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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

AN INTERPRETATION OF AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT ON STAFF MEETINGS

by

BARBARA HOFFMAN

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Date ....4/14/89.....

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to field test an action research spiral (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1985, p.8) in an educational context by generating data on how monthly staff meetings could be improved. The project sought answers to the following questions:

1. Could a group of secondary school educators successfully implement the action research spiral as a means to enact change in a specific school practice?
2. What would be key considerations for use of the action research spiral in an educational context?
3. Could this research model enhance democratization of communication among educators about their practice?

Monthly collaborative group meetings, journal entries as offered by collaborators, summations of monthly collaborative meetings, field notes, rating scales, and interviews with collaborators constituted the instruments for data gathering in this research endeavor. Analysis of the data occurred through identification of recurrent questions or themes raised during the collaborative process and through the personal interviews.

The number of collaborators engaged in monthly collaborative group meetings varied between five and eight

educators, two of whom were administrators. Final interviews about the collaboration were conducted with five of the collaborators.

The results of the study with respect to the specificity of the collaborative context can be summarized as follows:

1. A collaborative group of educators were able to enact positive changes at monthly staff meetings through use of an action research model. Major changes were related to establishing compulsory attendance, to pacing items on the agenda, to establishing a clear communicative purpose for each agenda item, to sharing food, and to fostering professionalism.
2. Essential considerations for use of this research model in an educational setting included the lengthy time frame needed for collaborative action, limiting communicative factors such as the ATA Code of Ethics and the nature of the school year, and the varying context of the model as the action research evolved.
3. The fragility of the model in an educational setting was demonstrated by the loss of the collaborative principal at the end of the school year which led to closure of this action research endeavor.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background of the Research Problem

> The technologizing effect of bureaucratized institutions is that it objectifies human intentions and interventions subject to behavioral evaluation; it erodes the personal aspects of professional techniques, skills, and ethical tactfulness; it directs accountability downwards and responsibility upwards in the institutional power structures, and it makes possible the centralized bureaucratic and political exercise of interest and control (Van Manen, 1984, p.5).

My research endeavor evolved through an interactive process. The first element determining my definition of the research project was that I was enrolled in a course in my M. Ed. program that required me to engage in an action research endeavor requiring collaborative action. As I started to formulate the question that would lead to a research action, I first looked at my own agenda. What was I hoping for?

1. I wanted to complete requirements for a university course.
2. I wanted to find a non-confrontational way of acting that would enhance my relations with my teaching

peers and administrators.

3. I wanted to define a research problem that would lead to improved communication and to improved morale amongst our staff.
4. I hoped to demonstrate to other staff members a model for action/change that was non-authoritarian and participatory.
5. I hoped to encourage my colleagues to reflect more about our practice and to share thoughts in an atmosphere where discourse would be encouraged.
6. I wanted to become a catalyst that would result in some significant change in our school.
7. I wanted to empower myself as a teacher.

I had many concerns about the nature and implications of using an action research model to resolve a research question. It seemed that I might be manipulating my colleagues to suit my own agenda.

1. How would I be able to present my concern in such a way that it was not only a personal concern, but also, a concern of other teachers?
2. Would I be able to accept a collaborative decision (the general will) if it did not agree with my personal vision? What is the nature of 'vision' in collaborative research?
3. How would I find true collaborators and later, how would we realize the collaborative action?

4. How would requesting my fellow teachers to act on my research question affect my collegiality with them?
5. Would I have to use my status at the university to gain credibility as a researcher with my colleagues?
6. How would I ethically choose to act if the results of this project led to discomfort or closure with some of the collaborators?

As I struggled with these questions, I thought of the subtleties of the words 'action research', giving prominence to the first word 'action' or 'act-on'.

> Remember that strategic action is your way to improve practice and your understanding of apparent and real constraints on change (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982, p. 18).

Research questions require 'acting on'. Something had to be changed. I wanted this project to direct educators in a way that would lead to emancipation.

> What is required is the development of a form of communication which is free from the distortions imposed by a false consciousness and unequal relations of power amongst the participants (Carson, 1985, p. 9).

I sought a research project that would enable educators to reflect upon our practice, to raise questions, and to act upon our questions. I hoped this would lead to identification of:

1. new ideas for educational practice,
2. hidden assumptions embedded in current practice,
3. our own teaching practice,
4. people with whom I collaborated in this project,

5. understanding of administrative practice,
6. my own theoretical context, and
7. hidden perceptions that interfere with collegial relationships among staff members.

I hoped that laying the questions open to a group of educators who were willing to reflect, and who then acted upon their questions, would help answer my quest. I hoped we would all benefit and act in terms of the Greek phronesis, praxis, guided by a moral disposition to act truly and justly.

> Third, policymakers believe that it is sufficient to cause something to occur by legislating that it should occur (Wise, 1977, p. 49).

A second factor which led directly to the context of the research question, how to improve staff meetings, began when the principal of my school issued a directive that required all teachers to submit a list of students' names to the administration on a monthly basis. These students would then receive a letter from the principal, naming them as 'Student of the Month'. No discussion concerning implementation occurred at the staff meeting, other than the principal's affirmation that positive reinforcement to students would lead to improved school morale and a more positive learning climate in our classrooms.

After hearing the directive, my first concern was what criteria I would use to choose the 'Student of the

Month'. Would I use marks only, attitude and behaviour, or a combination of these? Would it be 'legitimate' to give a poor achiever who was a hard worker such recognition? What would I do to classroom morale if I missed recognizing a student who felt deserving? Would this recognition lead to resentment? When was I going to find the necessary time to give this seemingly simple task the thought it required to result in appropriate action?

A second issue occurred to me. Was improvement of student morale the only intended outcome of this directive? I thought not. The principal, having recently replaced his predecessor under some very negative circumstances, was also trying to establish his role in the school and in the community. The letters would possibly be a means to assert his leadership.

Feeling confused concerning the lack of direction about how to choose the 'Student of the Month' and feeling manipulated by the principal (whom I perceived was using my efforts to achieve his own ends), I decided to talk first to my colleagues, and then, to the principal. My colleagues seemed as uncomfortable as I was concerning the criteria to be used for choosing the 'Student of the Month'. It appeared that each teacher would determine his or her own method of selection. None of the teachers to whom I talked questioned the intended objective of this innovation and seemingly accepted that it was just another

task to be completed.

My next approach to relieving my acute discomfort was to talk to the principal. I explained my discomfort with the open-ended nature of the selection criteria for 'Student of the Month'. My principal said that as long as I chose what the criteria were and wrote these down, he would accept them. He also argued that positive reinforcement was obviously of value. He did not seem to understand why I was questioning implementation of this practice. At this meeting, I did not feel enough trust existed in our collegial relationship to raise the questions of manipulation or of possible negative effects for those students who felt 'left out'. Nor did I raise the issue of why, as an educator, I had to subscribe to a positivist model of behaviour for my students. Why was being a successful student not a reward in and of itself? As an educator, I wanted to encourage intrinsic motivation in my students.

The communication situations that resulted from the 'Student of the Month' directive caused me to feel a great sense of malaise, both with my colleagues who seemed to accept without questioning, and with my principal, who did not seem interested in really hearing my point of view.

> Since interest-free knowledge is logically impossible, we should feel free to substitute explicit interests for implicit ones (Reinharz, 1985, p.17).

So, my research question arose from a seemingly logical and simple administrative directive issued to teachers at a monthly staff meeting. This directive added another responsibility to my teaching duties. Because this directive had been given at a staff meeting, and because the procedural nature of the meeting did not allow for adequate thought or deliberation of the issues raised in that no time was allowed for adequate discussion, I began to question the value and purpose of having staff meetings. Specifically, I began to question the lack of power I was experiencing in decision-making related to my teaching responsibilities.

It occurred to me that in twelve years of teaching practice in five different school situations, I had never met any teacher who looked forward to staff meetings. Teachers seem to regard monthly staff meetings as of minimal value to their practice and often as 'something that has to be endured'. My reflective questioning started to focus on how this perception could be changed within this school's context.

How could I use an action research model to democratize the decision-making that occurs at staff meetings? Would my research agenda be shared by other collaborators? How would I introduce such a political agenda into my school? Would this be possible, given the current bureaucratic, authoritarian pattern of school

administrative practice at staff meetings? I looked to Carson (1985) who argues that:

> ...action research experiences based upon ideals of rational communication, just decision-making and collaborative action will expose the distortions, the injustices and the coercions of the institution (p.14).

Refining the actual research question proved to be difficult. It required 'acting on' - something had to be changed. I wanted staff meetings to be venues for discourse about our educational practice. I wanted staff meetings to encourage an atmosphere of friendly collegiality. I wanted staff meetings to be a means by which our staff became united in aim and purpose. I wanted staff meetings to help me improve what I do in the school context. I wanted staff meetings to matter to me. I wanted other staff members to care more about their practice. I wanted.... My research question became a synthesis of all my 'I wants'.

Although the initial impetus of the research question was to focus on how to improve staff meetings and improve communication, the contextual nature of the collaborative action led to a duality in the research endeavor. As the project unfolded, I became aware that I felt a tension about the research model itself. It seemed so important to me that I document the collaborative process, as well as the data generated about staff meetings. I had two

distinct agendas: one to improve staff meetings, and the second to interpret and reflect on the action research model used in this study. The dominance of an analysis of the action research model occurred almost unwillingly. The richness of experience that we collaborators gained through the collaborative process simply could not be ignored. In this way, the context of my research endeavor expanded to include both data generated by the research question and data generated by the research model.

Purpose of the Research Project

> Knowledge emerges only through intervention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world and with each other (unidentified quote from A THESIS PROPOSAL by Sue Leighton, 1986, p.1).

Monthly staff meetings provide a forum for discussion amongst administrative and teaching practitioners. They also provide an opportunity for changes to be introduced and discussed by everyone affected by such changes. Consequently, I chose to use an action research model as a means to have educational practitioners evaluate the staff meetings that were occurring at our school. This collaborative action led to two levels of inquiry: one about staff meetings and the second, about the action research model and our collaboration.

Staff Meetings

One objective of this research project was to uncover the unstated, underlying assumptions of current educational practice at monthly staff meetings. A second intent was to arrive at a collegial perception of whether such staff meetings are necessary. If so, a third objective was to enact changes at these meetings which would lead to improved practice at these meetings. A fourth intent of this research project was to democratize the communication that occurs amongst the staff. This was to be accomplished by using a model that allowed for more equitable reflection/participation in decision-making about educational concerns.

The Collaborative Action Research Model

The introspective nature of this reflection and description coincides with what Habermas (1971) referred to as "hermeneutic sciences":

> ...reality is interpreted according to a specific grammar of world views and of action.... They grasp interpretations of reality with regard to an intersubjectivity of action-orienting understanding possible from a given hermeneutic starting point (p.195).

Experiences are interpreted with a goal of improving existing practices "within existing consciousness and values from which a sense of 'right' is utilized to guide action" (Tripp, 1984, p. 12). The language framework from which this project is written, stems from an hermeneutic/interpretation type of inquiry.

This thesis focuses on the changes that occurred as a result of the action research project, their consequences, and their applications to staff meeting practices in general. I will also present critical reflection about the effectiveness of the model used for the research project. The data for an analysis of the research model were gathered through a rating scale completed by collaborators after every second collaborative meeting (See Appendix V) and through an analysis of journal entries. A final analysis of the research model was conducted upon completion of the research project through individual interviews with each collaborator.

I am also hopeful that the reflection about the action research model that was used in this study will encourage further questions for future researchers. The 'teacher as researcher' within his or her own school context is a relatively new concept in research design. One of the purposes of this study was to design a research action endeavour and evaluate it, both in terms of data and function. I am hopeful that my analysis of the action research design used in this study will identify techniques, strengths, and weaknesses of my experience for the benefit of those educators who later choose to use an action research model.

In choosing to use action research within the context of a single school, I was not attempting to achieve

generalizable results. Through description and critical reflection of what is, this research project will attempt to allow the reader to identify similar assumptions of practices which are familiar to the reader. The reader will then have the opportunity to explore these assumptions or practices, critically reflect upon them, and enact change as required by the reflection in her or his own practice.

Definition of Terms

Unless specified as otherwise, the definitions of terms are as found in the Random House Dictionary of the English Language. New York: Random House Inc., 1983.

ACTION RESEARCH - a plan of action which allows for the trying out of new ideas in practice as a means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge about curriculum, teaching, and learning. (McTaggart, 1981, p. 5). The aim of action research is to involve participants in communication aimed at mutual understanding and consensus, in common action towards achieving fulfilment for all (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 199);

BUREAUCRATIZATION - activity whereby there occurs excessive multiplication of, and concentration of power in administrative bureaus or administrators (p. 198);

COLLABORATIVE INVOLVEMENT - the research process is extended towards including all those involved in or affected by the action (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 199);

COLLABORATOR - one who co-operates, works with one another willingly; to work in partnership as opposed to being a mentor - a trusted advisor (p. 289);

COLLEGIAL - in relation to an organized association of persons having certain powers and rights, and performing certain duties or engaged in a particular pursuit (p. 209);

CONSENSUS - the act of participating in a discourse, of attempting discursively to come to an agreement about the truth of a problematic statement or the correctness of a problematic norm, carrying with it the supposition that a genuine agreement is possible. The outcome of the discussion will be the result of the force of the better argument and not of accidental or systematic constraints on discussion (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 143).

DECONSTRUCTION - an intellectual strategy and a mode of reading that identifies in the text the rhetorical operations that produce the supposed ground of argument, the key concept or premise (Culler, 1989, p. 86);

DEMOCRATIZE - to make or become democratic, in accordance with the principle of equal rights for all, i.e., a democratic decision (p. 384);

EMANCIPATION - the act of freeing from constraint or restriction by custom, tradition (p. 465);

EMANCIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH - a form of action research where the practioner group takes joint responsibility for the development of practice, understandings and situations.... This involves an understanding of the dialectical relationship between individual and group responsibility, in which neither individuals nor the group are the sole arbiters of policy or practice, and in which a process of collaborative action research is employed in an open-minded, open-eyed way to explore the problems and effects of group policies and individual practices (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, pp. 203-204);

HERMENEUTICS - the art, skill, or theory of interpretation, of understanding the significance of human actions, utterances, products, and institutions. It is a mental discipline that is concerned with methods

of human studies that seek an understanding (verstehen) of their essentially meaningful subject-matter (Bullock and Stallybrass, 1983, p. 281);

INTERSUBJECTIVITY - involving or ocurring between separate conscious minds (p. 600);

ONTOLOGY - the nature of being or existence as such (p. 1007);

OPEN - unreserved, candid, or frank, as persons of their speech (p. 1008);

PHRONESIS - the disposition to act truly, rightly, prudently, and responsively to circumstances. This term incorporates a time-honored view of the role of the teacher dating back to the ancient Greeks. It treats education as a practice which is guided by complex, sometimes competing intentions, which are themselves modified according to circumstances. (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 37);

PRAXIS - action with and for the critical development of understanding and commitment. The action researcher sets out to improve particular practices, understandings and situations by acting in a deliberate and considered way in which understandings and values are consciously expressed through action (Carr and Kemmis, 1968, p. 192);

SUBJECTIVITY - relating to or of the nature of an object as it is known in the mind as a thing that is distinct from a thing in itself (p. 1415).

Limitations

The results of this research depended upon the quality of the collaboration among the teaching and administrative participants. At times a lack of trust between the teachers and administration hampered 'the laying open of the question' so important to the success of this project. Some teachers felt that if they openly expressed their concerns, the administration of the school, might react in a negative fashion when preparing the teachers evaluations or timetables.

A second limitation was the link between the principal of the school who ran the meetings, and the researcher, me. We provided the impetus for critical reflection about current staff meeting practices. Whenever a breakdown occurred in our communication, further collaborative action was nullified. The principal was empowered to make changes on a school-wide basis. Teachers were not empowered to do so without a sharing of power by the administration.

A third limitation was that the collaborators were not representative of the teaching population of the

school. As participation was voluntary, only teachers who shared a particular orientation chose to become involved in this research project. Those teachers who chose not to become involved might have a different conceptual framework, or perhaps the nature of collaborative action presupposes interaction among people who like to share publicly, rather than remain private.

A fourth limitation was my own theoretical construct in analyzing the research data.

> The dissolution of the reader into codes is a critique of the phenomenological accounts of reading; but even if the reader is conceived as the product of codes - a product whose subjectivity, Barthe writes, is an assemblage of stereotypes...(Culler, 1982, p. 33).

In accordance with a deconstruction strategy, my telling of this research story meant that I necessarily gave dominance to certain codes of data which were compatible with my own theoretical construct. In accordance with Habermas, (1974, p. 44) 'knowledge-constitutive interests' that are the outcomes of conditioning by historical and social conditions framed my reading of the action research endeavor. Perhaps the data I chose not to include in the analysis would have laid open new areas for critical reflection.

Assumptions

1. That collaborators who volunteered would continue to do so until completion of the project.
2. That collaborators would be candid and articulate during reflection sessions, during interviews, and in any notes or journals that became data for this project.
3. That there would be a commonality in the themes that arose from the interviews, reflection sessions, notes, or journals, or that a commonality might be found. This commonality would allow us to arrive at shared perceptions of the assumptions we hold about staff meetings and how we would like to see them change.
4. That the research project would continue in accordance with Kemmis' and McTaggart's action research model (The Action Research Planner) until the collaborators agree that the project had been successfully completed, or could no longer proceed because of attrition of the participants.
5. That the basic model for this project would be an action research spiral based on the hermeneutic ontology of subjectivity.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Teacher as Researcher

> The kind of educational system we have today is contributing to the kind of social future we shall have tomorrow. At the same time, the educational system is embedded in the current social fabric. Is it reasonable, therefore, to expect much dramatic change on society to be effected through the educational system? (Berghofer, 1977, p. 6).

If one accepts the premises from which Berghofer's question arises, it is clear that educational researchers must pay attention to what sorts of beliefs about people and the world lead to the construction of a 'curriculum'? Curriculum is a way of organizing a set of human educational practices. It is a cultural construction and a reflection of a particular social milieu arising out of a set of historical circumstances (Grundy, 1987, p. 6). Where are we coming from?

From Aristotle, contemporary educational practice has inherited the notion of praxis. At that time, praxis referred to the sphere of human action. It focused on maintaining an order of virtuous conduct (the good and just life) among the citizens of the polis. For Aristotle, the life proper to men was primarily a life of

virtuous action.

For Hobbes, the problem of the virtuous life of the polis was transformed into the technical problem of regulating social discourse to ensure the well-being of the citizens of the state. Hobbes declared human behavior to be a legitimate object of scientific knowledge, giving rise to a Positivist philosophy or an empirical-analytical epistemology of knowledge (Grundy, 1987).

In the social sciences, the Positivist philosophy of empirical-analytical research implies that learning is an accumulation of skills and knowledge that can be taught and tested separately. Another premise of a Positivist research approach is that if experimentation is carried out with sufficiently large numbers, the results may be generalized for a wider population or formulated into 'laws governing human behavior'. Experience has shown that what is true of one individual or group of individuals in one context proves inapplicable to others in other contexts (Goswami and Stillman, 1987). Nonetheless, this model for research has dominated educational inquiry to the present. Habermas sheds some light on why this remains so.

Habermas' (1972) theory of knowledge-constitutive interests discusses the fundamental human interests that influence how knowledge is constructed. Furthermore, Habermas holds that there is a fundamental orientation of

the species towards preservation of life and knowledge (or rationality). The way in which that orientation works itself out in the life structures of the species determines what counts as knowledge. Habermas identifies three basic knowledge-constitutive interests: the technical, the practical, and the emancipatory (Grundy, 1987).

The technical interest strives to control and manage the environment through an empirical-analytical experience of the world. The form of action that results from the technical interest is poietike, the action resulting from the idea or image or pattern of what the artisan is trying to make. This curriculum stresses the importance of plans or programmes as in Tyler's model of behavioral objectives. The range of choice (freedom) is always restricted by the eidos (idea) of what is to be created. This model of inquiry allows us to predict and to anticipate based on our experiences of today so that we can formulate rules for action based on regularities. Knowledge is seen as power resulting in predictability and control. In education, the technical interest performs the reproductive function of maintaining existing power relationships of this historical moment. Strategic action means correct evaluation of possible alternative choices within the existing power relationships (Grundy, 1987).

The technical interest implies a hierarchical relationship between theory and practice, or between the researcher and practitioner. Practices exist to bring certain plans to fulfillment. Ultimate power resides with the one who forms the objectives eidos and who uses knowledge as a commodity. Knowledge becomes countable, measurable, and impersonal, with the result that theory directs, confirms, and legitimizes practice (Grundy, 1987).

Krawchenko, Paradis, and Sommerfeld (1985) argue that:

> Curriculum is in the end, what people act out on the basis of their own understanding and at this level there exists a whole underworld of process which are not captured by data of the factual sort (p. 2).

They further state (1985) that it is one thing to learn about what intentions are expressed on paper, mandated to committees and wrapped up in a curricular package, yet another problem to mediate between a documented curriculum and the lived one. Something quite different from the original curriculum eidos emerges when practitioners share their perceptions of how policy is acted out, of how change is enacted in their classrooms, and of what shortcomings they find in the development process. If this is so, the research task requires uncovering and resolving problematic areas posed by praxis. Krawchenko, Paradis, and Sommerfeld (1985) say:

> But perhaps, in a radical re-interpretation of curriculum, we should place the subjective factor squarely at the centre of our provings and conceptions, predicate our development model on this centrality and acknowledge a whole new set of tasks in the process (p.6).

Stenhouse (1975) has also argued for teacher-research. He argues that improving educational practice requires teachers acquiring a deeper understanding of their own work, claiming that using research means doing research . He implies that teachers need to go beyond being reflective or critical users of research knowledge produced by other researchers. Stenhouse asks teachers to form communities of teacher-researchers who develop the educational knowledge that justifies their educational practices.

Carson (1987) also speaks about a gap between researchers and practitioners. He states:

> Researchers and teachers live in two different worlds, speaking languages that are unfamiliar to one another, and seldom 'communicating'. In the world of the researcher, educational phenomena is (sic) isolated into individual factors such as; intelligence, motivation, achievement, and a host of others. These are properly investigated by sampling widely, so that one can make broad generalizations that will be true regardless of particular contexts. In the world of teaching these factors do not appear as isolated phenomena, but they come together during the course of the day to day work with young people. ....Social reality unlike physical reality, is humanly constructed. This means that reality is interpreted and actively created (p. 1).

How do teachers interpret their reality? This leads to a discussion of how subjectivity and interpretation lead us

to a reconstruction of knowledge about our historical moment.

Subjectivity and Interpretation

> One of the basic things we observe about man is that he constantly gives meaning to things: he is forced to define the ever-changing situations of which he is a part, to classify things around him, to shape his perceptions, to interpret his experience, to anticipate the actions of others, and to interrelate the past and present (Werner, 1977, p. 8).

Subjectivity is acknowledged as a valid premise for research in interpretive studies grounded in hermeneutics. The most significant feature of an hermeneutic ontology is the notion of 'subjective meaning'. Actions can only be interpreted by reference to the actor's motives, intentions, or purposes in performing the action. To identify these motives and intentions is to grasp the 'subjective meaning' the action has to the actor. Carson (1986) has stated:

> The world discloses itself to us through language, so the conduct of research using hermeneutic conversation asks us as participants to be attentive to the language we use while we speak of our intentions and practices as teachers and consultants (p.119).

The notion of subjectivity is grounded in the 'notion of the practical'. Aristotle identified and analyzed this form of action as being dependent on human judgement, made on the basis of an interpretation of the meaning of a

situation. Practical action is different from strategic action in the technical interest in that action resulting from practical judgement stands to be evaluated on its own terms, rather than by the degree to which it implements a particular idea. Deliberation (reflection) is an essential element of practical action which seeks improvement in a subject or situation. Phronesis gives rise to practical judgement, which is centered on making the right decisions about 'what ought' to be in any given situation (Grundy, 1987).

The practical interest, implies the right of particpants to be seen as subjects, not objects, with the right to determine 'authenticity' of meaning to his or her capacity. Michael Polyani (1962) indicated that there is a structure of tacit knowing that serves as a foundation for the more explicit types of activities practitioners usually talk about. Gadamer (1977) acknowledges the power of reflection as being that of bringing to consciousness that which is implicitly and unquestionably accepted (p.38). The practical interest has at its base the understanding of the meaning of the situation by the practitioner. It arises from reflective deliberation upon the situation, upon previous action and upon theoretical explanations which may assist interpretation.

According to Habermas, the basic orientation of the practical interest is toward understanding the environment

so one is able to interact with it. Understanding of the meaning of the situation is required to produce knowledge. This kind of knowledge is to be judged as to whether the interpreted meaning assisted the process of making judgement about how to act rationally and morally (phronesis). Action is reproduced as a text so it can be interpreted.

Confidence in an interpretation relies upon agreement with others that such an interpretation is reasonable. There is a democratic principle inherent in interpretation which requires consensus in interpretation of meaning (Grundy, 1987). Because an individual's identity is so closely related to the values, beliefs and attitudes inherent in the language of his or her own thinking, alternative interpretations of the situation will be resisted by the individual. Deliberation through a collaborative process arriving at consensus, allows the individual practitioner to effect change. Schwab's work on the 'practical' and 'practical deliberation' reaffirms that deliberation is needed when considering alternate courses of action in a given situation and which courses of action most fully express the purposes and commitments of the educator.

In research with an interpretive orientation, a text is created wherein the practitioner engages in a dialogue

with the researcher. The text attempts to clarify motives, experiences, and common meaning. The researcher and practitioner(s) enter into an inter-subjective dialogue within the research situation from which each hopes to come to a deeper understanding of the meaning of events being experienced in their education practice.

Critical Reflection, Collaboration, and Emancipation

> As we attempt to analyze dialogue as a human phenomenon, we discover something which is the essence of dialogue itself; the word. But the word is more than just an instrument which makes dialogue possible...there is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus to speak a true word is to transform the world (Freire, 1972b, pp. 60-61).

For Freire, integration with the world is possible to the extent that humans utilize their power to reflect not only upon their actions, but also upon themselves as the subjects in whom decision-making is seated. He claims true knowing is possible when people attain a state of 'critical transivity', a state of consciousness in which they think as subjects. Consciousness goes out to reality, examining it, exploring it, and questioning it. Critical transitive consciousness is achieved through a process called conscientization.

Conscientization is a basic dimension of human reflective action which expresses the knowing process in which oppressed individuals and classes become subjects.

Liberation comes about through conscientization when people 'take possession' of reality, demythologize it and act upon it. A consciousness fully intent upon the world is consciousness that combines reflection with action for human liberation. Freire says that one truly knows when he or she moves toward reflection and action upon the world (Collins, 1977).

For Habermas (1972), as well as Freire, the emancipatory interest leads to autonomous, responsible action based upon prudent decisions informed by a certain kind of knowledge. This autonomous action is concerned with empowerment arising out of authentic, critical insights into the social construction of human society. A critical social theory arises out of the problems of everyday life and attempts to pose solutions for them. The solutions are derived through a process of collaborative discourse which leads to rational consensus. Habermas (1974), affirms this when he says:

> Critique understands that its claim to validity can be verified only in the successful process of enlightenment, and that means in the practical discourse of those concerned (p. 2).

Later, Habermas (1974) describes the interrelationship of emancipatory theory and practice when he states:

> Decisions for the political struggle cannot at the outset be justified theoretically and then carried out organizationally. The sole possible justification at this level is consensus aimed at in practical discourse, among participants,

> who, in the consciousness of their common interest and their knowledge of the circumstance, of the predictable consequences and the secondary consequences, are the only ones who can know what risks they are willing to undergo,and with what expectations (p. 33).

Prudent decisions will require that one acts, not only in agreement with critical theory, but also in accord with the possibilities of the given situation. Praxis assumes a process of meaning-making, where the meaning is socially constructed, not absolute. Aoki (1978) describes this as:

> In critical inquiry the researcher himself becomes part of the object of inquiry. The researcher, in becoming involved with his subjects, enters into their world and engages them in mutually reflective activity. He questions his subjects and himself. Reflection by himself and participants allows new questions to emerge, which in turn leads to more reflection. In the ongoing process which is dialectical and transformative, both researcher and subjects become participants in an open dialogue (p. 13).

Action is taken in light of a developing critical consciousness about a given social construction. Praxis always combines reflection with action to create the human world of ideas, symbols, and language. Mere intellectualizing or action for action's sake is alienating because each lacks human commitment and makes dialogue impossible (Collins, 1977).

Habermas (1974) says that the distorting power of ideology is such that distinctions between the cultural and natural are not easily discernible. Freire (1972b) holds that empowerment flows from the recognition that the cultural world is a human construction and is capable of

being recreated.

Through processes of reflection, a group of people may come to a consensus that the critical theorem provides them with authentic insights into the interests which determine the organization and operation of the group. This is what is meant by enlightenment (Grundy, 1987). Cosgrove (1982) also recognizes that negotiation agrees with the democratic principle "that people should have the right to help determine the activities in which they will participate" (p. 46). The principle of involvement is of equal value as the aim of improvement. Consensus must be freely arrived at while recognizing that in any situation, only the participants themselves can construct the risky decisions of human action.

> Smyth (1986) further develops this argument. He says:
>
> So much of what teachers do in schools appears to be habituated and to originate from social conditions over which they are effectively prevented from exercising deliberate control. Because teachers are embedded in their actions, they are often blinded to the kaleidoscope of events and issues and may become unaware of many of the unintended consequences that arise from these ideological distortions. It is uncovering the fundamental contradictions within their practice that it becomes possible for teachers to see how their intensions are thwarted and become unrealisable (pp. 27-28).

Emancipation (empowerment) does not necessarily follow from enlightenment. Emancipation lies in the possibility of taking action autonomously. Action following from enlightenment must become a matter of free

choice (Grundy, 1987). Michael Apple (1979) comments about this:

> ...one of the fundamental conditions of emancipation is the ability to 'see' the actual functionings of institutions in all their positive and negative complexity, to assist others (and to let them assist us) in 'remembering' the possibilities of spontaneity, choice, and more equal modes of control (p. 163).

Action Research

Schumacher (1975) has called for throwing decision-making back onto local groups, recreating a sense of local community and an ability to solve problems at a local level. He sees that a major implication for educators is to accept more responsibility for everything they do.

Carr and Kemmis (1986) affirm this belief:

> To transform the ideology of our present society, characterized by forms of work which do not provide access for all to an interesting and satisfying life, forms of communication which do not aim at the achievement of mutual understanding and rational consensus among people, and forms of decision-making which do not aim for social justice in which people participate democratically in making the decisions affecting their lives, we must transform our current practices of work, communication and decision-making (p. 193).

They further suggest that "by changing his or her own practices, understandings or situation, action research reminds the practitioner that he, or she, is in some small

way, changing the world" (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 193).

Carr and Kemmis (1986) propose the development of action research as a critical educational science that is oriented toward the development of teaching as a "praxis in self-reflective communities of educators". A basic assumption of this orientation holds that practice determines the value of any educational theory, rather than that theory determines the value of any educational practice. The active participation of practitioners in the research enterprise is a necessity.

Action research is defined by Carr and Kemmis (1986) as:

> a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which these practices are carried out (p. 162).

The 'methodology' of action research requires a self-reflective spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting as originated by Kurt Lewin, (1946). As outlined by Kemmis and McTaggart (1982), the plan must prescribe action. Recognizing the risks involved in social change, the plan allows the practitioner to go beyond present constraints and to act more effectively as an educator. As a part of the plan, participants collaborate in a discourse which builds a language for analysis and understanding of the situation. Improvement as a result of the plan is a problematic

notion within the action research model. Improvement in 'the situation' by the participants is intertwined with the participants' understandings of the meaning of that which is currently occuring. Thus improvement in understanding is linked with improvement in action. Praxis becomes both thought and action guided by phronesis. So action, the second phase of the spiral, is always fluid - requiring current decisions about what is to be done. The 'action moment' shows the exercise of 'practical judgement' to obtain improvement of understanding, improvement of the situation in which the action takes place, and improvement in practice.

The third phase, observation, provides the necessary documentation for subsequent reflection. Its subject matter will be the action, its effects, and the context of the situation in which the action must be taken.

To conclude, action research attempts to improve and involve. Carson (1985), affirms this purpose:

> True collaboration requires a genuine and active solidarity based on a voluntary co-action of researchers and practitioners, where the practitioners themselves become researchers into their own practice, and where the researcher is committed to helping both this process and the overall goals of democratic school improvement (p. 11).

Praxis emanating from collaborative action research seeks also to improve the critical consciousness of the participants to act in ways which enable them to be in control of that situation. Praxis assumes a process of

meaning-making which recognizes meaning as a social construction. Praxis derived through collaborative action not only changes the situation, but also the understanding of that situation. This leads to the research action of how staff meetings could be improved.

CHAPTER III

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The practice of monthly staff meetings and the underlying bureaucratic assumptions about these meetings were examined by a group of collaborators who are educators at the school in question. We endeavored to reflect upon current assumptions and methods used to govern staff meetings. We planned and implemented changes in our practice and then, reflected on those changes, implementing further changes as required. In so doing, we laid open questions leading to a greater understanding of the intent and consequences of monthly staff meetings. Collaborators also engaged in a self-reflective process of identifying their own theoretical frameworks. This identifying of frameworks was implemented through collaborative discussion, through critical collaborative analysis of personal journal entries, and through analysis of tapescripts of the collaborative meetings.

The collaborative group attempted to enact change only where group consensus agreed that the current practice should and could be improved. These changes were further reflected on after implementation occurred at the following staff meeting.

The collaborative discussions and often the journal entries focused on the improvement of staff meetings. My own field notes from spontaneous discussions, journal entries, and rating scales (Appendix V) completed by collaborators generated data about the research model. In analyzing these data, I thematically analyzed the discussion group meetings (Appendix I) and selected collaborators' relevant remarks from the personal interview transcripts (Appendix II) concerning the research model. The personal interview remarks were selected if they supported themes identified in the group discussions, or if they commented on the research model. The purpose of this research project was dual: to improve staff meetings and to field test an action research design. The selection of thematic and individual items of analysis reflected this duality. The process used for the analysis of data generated by this research project will be clarified later in this chapter.

Collaboration

Finding colleagues who would be willing to collaborate with me on the research question was my first task after defining the research question. This involved a process of negotiation (discussion) with colleagues. We negotiated time. We negotiated the meaning of the

research question. We negotiated their loyalty to the administration and their commitment to the enhancement of their teaching practice. We negotiated their commitment to improved morale in the school. We negotiated their trust in me. We negotiated their professional consciousness. We negotiated continuously throughout the research endeavour.

This negotiation of meaning throughout the discussion group meetings and interviews became a dialogue wherein the research subjects (the collaborators) were active agents empowered to understand and change their situations. Negotiation of meaning moved beyond the personal level to an emancipatory experience where self-reflection and deeper understanding led to questioning of taken-for-granted beliefs and of administrative authority. The negotiation of meaning and acceptance of the equality of participation in the collaborative action meant that consensus became the mediator for change rather than authority. This led to a sense of empowerment, not only as individuals, but as a group acting as a catalyst for change. The research model provided the collaborators with a means to enact change without challenging authority. Since the administration was an integral part of the collaborative action, a sense of 'us' emerged which de-emphasized normal authoritarian patterns of communication.

Achieving equality of participation in the collaborative action required extensive negotiations between the administration and myself. This meant meeting on a one-to-one basis to clarify our mutual intentions. This negotiation to clarify concerns that were resulting in frustration with the research project continued throughout the research endeavor and often created tension, as I was frequently placed in the role of mediator between one of the administrators and the other collaborators who sometimes disagreed about the communicative process. Since my personal commitment to this research endeavor was obviously greater than that of the other collaborators, I was always expected to draw the group together at times of dissent or conflict. Occasionally it became necessary to remind the collaborative group that one of our purposes was to improve communication amongst educators in our school. This would only be possible if each collaborator could candidly offer his or her opinions. In this sense, I assumed a leadership role throughout the continuation of the collaboration.

The nature of collaboration is such that the reflection always lays open new questions. Some of these questions seemed unimportant to my personal agenda as a collaborator. This created a need for me to critically reflect on whether or not I had any right to manipulate

the collaboration by refocusing the reflection on issues relating to my research. Having initiated the research project, I realized that my personal agenda had already played a definitive role in the research endeavor. The question of emancipation or manipulation seemed to bother me less as the collaboration continued. This was because the loyalty of the collaborators to their collaborative purpose dominated the discussions. There was a commitment to the collaboration that seemed to override the need to express personal agendas.

Collaborators

The collaborators in this project were five to eight practising teachers and two administrators from one composite high school with a staff of fifty-six teachers. Participation was on a voluntary basis with no distinctions being made about age or gender. Because of the nature of the community where this research occurred, participants were from a middle socio-economic background.

Because current staff meeting practices were being determined by the school administration, two of the three school administrators were invited and agreed to become collaborators. They became 'key collaborators' because their approval was required before any changes could be implemented. In the case of the administrators, I

actively negotiated with them to become involved in the research project. Because my agenda was emancipatory action research, I manipulated the research question to be improving staff meetings so the administration had little choice but to become involved as collaborators.

Areas of expertise were not a variable of selection for the collaborators as the research question impinged on all educators at the school to some degree. It is acknowledged that teachers of a certain orientation (academic subjects) chose to become collaborators; whereas teachers in other subject areas chose not to become involved. This, admittedly, narrowed the focus of the research data. Perhaps this occurred because of my personal affiliation with academic teachers, rather than with teachers of other subjects. Since I initiated this project and invited all staff members at a general staff meeting to become involved in the collaborative action, I must wonder why only certain people chose to commit themselves to this research endeavor. I am convinced that a contributing factor in their commitment was a sense of loyalty to me on a personal level.

Early in the collaboration, I mistakenly assumed that one of the administrators had decided not to attend a discussion group meeting. His absence would have meant closure of the collaborative action. As this became clear, the loyalty of the other collaborators to my agenda

was expressed as follows:

> We have a major problem. (name of administrator) is downstairs talking to (name), waiting for people who aren't here to come. And I just mentioned to (administrator) that we were waiting for him and he said, 'Well go ahead without me.'
>
> Is there any purpose in doing so?
>
> He's just standing there. They're not here. Should we fold this project with a letter about why?
>
> What does it do for your research?

I did not expect that, with the exception of the principal of the school, all collaborators would necessarily remain constant throughout the research enterprise. I hoped that there would be a core of collaborators who participated for the duration of the research project, while other collaborators would offer data on an 'interest only' basis. The research plan allowed for this to occur.

'Core' collaborators remained with the research project to closure. They offered data through the discussion group meetings, personal journal entries, and through personal interviews. Other staff members offered their reflections through conversations which I recorded as field notes, or through written articles which were transcribed and presented at the collaborative discussion group meetings for further reflection.

Data Gathering

Following is a brief description for each of the data-gathering sources. I will provide a brief outline of how each was used either in relation to the enactment of the research endeavor or the analysis of the research endeavour for this thesis.

Reflective Discussion Group Meetings

The major focus for the collaborative action in this research project occurred through discussion group meetings. Collaborators met once a month at lunch hour in a classroom in the school for the period of January, 1988, through to the end of May, 1988. Five of these discussion meetings occurred, during which collaborators raised questions relating to current practices at school staff meetings. Questions were laid open for critical reflection. When there was a group consensus to act, a plan for change was implemented at the following staff meeting. This change was then further reflected on at a subsequent discussion group meeting and changed again if necessary.

Typewritten Synopses of Reflective Discussion Group Meetings (Appendix III)

After each collaborative group discussion meeting, I provided collaborators with a three-to-four-page synopsis

(see Appendix III) of the questions and issues raised during the meeting. Each synopsis proved to be an impetus for reflection in the personal journals and at the subsequent discussion meetings.

I attempted to summarize the major areas of discussion at each meeting in short paragraphs. Collaborators preferred this medium compared to transcriptions of the whole meeting, because the synopses required less reading time and still highlighted and reminded them of reflective concerns raised during the previous discussion group meetings. These synopses were also distributed to a small number of individuals on staff who did not attend the discussion group meetings, but who showed an interest in the research project.

Journals Or Notes As Offered By Collaborators

Each collaborator was asked to maintain a written record in a journal or on separate notes of reflections about the research questions: staff meetings and the research model. These reflections were given to me on a monthly basis, and entries were then transcribed to ensure anonymity of authorship. The journal transcriptions were distributed to collaborators on a monthly basis, along with the synopses of the previous discussion group meeting. These journal entries afforded the collaborators with an opportunity for candid communication that did not

necessarily occur at the collaborative discussion meetings.

Field Notes

Oral feedback acquired from any staff member at times other than reflective discussion group meetings was recorded as field notes.

Rating Scales Focusing on the Collaborative Action (Appendix V)

A rating scale was presented to each collaborator at the end of every second discussion group meeting. I used these to determine the perceived success and emphasis of the collaborative discussion group meetings.

Transcriptions of Taped Interviews with Individual Collaborators

At the conclusion of the research project, I interviewed each collaborator who remained involved with the project about her or his perception of the project as a collaborator and of its effectiveness in resolving the original research question. The focus of this interview was the collaborative process. The transcriptions from these interviews provided data for analysis of the research model.

The Action Research Spiral

The concept of action research originated in the work of Kurt Lewin (1946) whose work featured the premise that those affected by planned changes should have the primary responsibility for deciding on courses of action and for evaluating the results of strategies tried out in practice. Lewin described action research as a spiral of steps consisting of planning, action, and the evaluation of the result of action (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982). Kemmis and McTaggart (1982) have defined four moments of action research as to plan, act, observe and reflect collaboratively.

The plan in this research endeavor was strategic in that it attempted to make monthly staff meetings more important to teachers by providing the staff with a model for change based on participatory decision-making. The plan was always provisional, flexible and open to change in light of questions laid open during the collaborative action. Collaborators engaged in building a language whereby they could improve their understandings of the situation through a continual analysis and reshaping of the plan.

The second moment of the research model was action. Action was grounded in prior practice, but relied on

practical judgement about what needed to be done to make improvements. Most of the action in this research endeavour focused on minor changes in practice (such as recording absenteeism) as the collaboration proceeded cautiously until a context of trust or loyalty was established. The action moments showed collaborators improving their understandings of themselves individually and collaboratively, and improving the situation which was monthly staff meetings. Collaborators shared their understandings with each other, making their tacit beliefs explicit and negotiable. The ensuing negotiation of meanings and arrival at a consensus of meanings served as a catalyst for improving communication individually and as a staff. The action moments occurred only after consensus had been achieved.

Observation documented the effects of action. The rating scales (Appendix V) provided an instrument for evaluation of this research plan. Observation provided a basis for critical reflection, the fourth moment in the research model.

Reflection dominated this action research project. The reflection sought to raise questions, make sense of and reconstruct the meaning of what was occurring through the collaborative action. Reflection occurred through the journals and reflective discussion group meetings and suggested ways of proceeding with the plan.

Data Analysis

The first attempt to analyze the data occurred when I summarized the discussion group meetings as presented in Appendix III. I looked for questions or areas of concern that had been focal points for the collaborative discussion, or that raised concerns requiring further deliberation by the collaborative group. I recognized the subjectivity and intersubjectivity that this form of summarization implicitly requires. Collaborators did have an opportunity to ask for change in the synopsis if they felt my summary did not accurately reflect the essential concerns of the previous discussion group meeting.

The journals and field notes were analyzed without having been thematized. After thematically summarizing the transcripts of discussion group meetings, I simply selected passages from the journals or field notes which supported the discussion group themes. These passages were presented as supporting quotes in this thesis.

In analyzing the transcriptions of the monthly discussion group meetings, I established eleven themes as the focal points to be discussed in this thesis. The data, as presented in Appendix I, were generally organized in the following categories.

1. equality and emancipation,
2. frequency and duration of monthly staff meetings,
3. professionalism,
4. the agenda for the meeting,
5. administrative concerns,
6. the collaborative action,
7. the research model,
8. social aspects of staff meetings,
9. communication,
10. the ATA component of staff meetings, and
11. attendance and other commitments teachers have.

These themes will be further discussed in the subsequent chapters. Chapter IV will focus on those themes (1, 6, 7 and 9) related to the collaborative action research, while Chapter V will focus on the themes (2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10 and 11) related to improving staff meetings.

CHAPTER IV

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE ACTION RESEARCH

Communication

Early in the research endeavour, a collaborator reiterated the basic premises for collaborative discussion: candidness and trust. This comment displays the committment to self-expression in a non-threatening context that is necessary for true collaboration to occur.

> ...but what I am saying is we have to address our communication in such a way that we can accomplish what it is that we want to accomplish, without having people drop out because they feel persecuted, I guess, and threatened.
>
> I have trouble with that because, well, through my life I have not been a very diplomatic person. Being the person that I am, I can tell people what I'm thinking, but if you have to start pussy-footing around and make innuendoes and implications about things, then you might as well throw your arms in the air and kiss it good-bye.
>
> You mean it's not worth your time then?
>
> It's not worth my time if I have to imply things, coming around through the back door. We're supposed to be making changes.

It soon became evident to us that the communication possible at discussion group sessions was disempowered by the ATA Code of Professional Conduct, in particular the

clauses noted below, quoted from the ATA Members' Handbook, "In relation to colleagues":

> 13. The teacher criticizes the professional competence or professional reputation of another teacher only in confidence to proper officials and after the other teacher has been informed of the criticism, and
>
> 16. The teacher recognizes the duty to protest through proper channels administrative policies and practices which the teacher cannot in conscience accept; and further recognizes that if administration by consent fails, the administrator must adopt a position of authority (p.8)

Clause 16, in particular, proved to be a gigantic hurdle to overcome in the collaboration, given that several administrators became members of the collaborative group. Administrators are responsible for teacher evaluation in current educational practice, so the fear of reprisal was ever-present amongst teacher collaborators. The following quotation supports this thesis:

> ...what I am saying is we have to address our communication in such a way that we can accomplish what it is we want to accomplish, without having people drop out because they feel persecuted, I guess, and threatened.

Collaborators used the anonymity of the journals to express their views about administrative practices that they questioned. As the research instigator, I was approached by the administration and reminded that if some of the journal comments continued to be critical of the

administration, the administrator concerned would discontinue the collaborative action. I negotiated this possible hiatus with the other collaborators as follows:

> I mean I was called in privately and told that this was becoming very threatening. We have to proceed very cautiously, from that point of view, or else it will just drop in our laps....I mean I've been told things like the word professional ethics, and so on, have come into our conversations in the journal writing.

This particular incident created great discomfort for many of the collaborators who felt that if they could not be candid in their remarks, the project would be betrayed. A process of negotiation followed between myself and the other collaborators as to how we could best achieve our research goal by circumventing the difficulties imposed on us by the Code of Professional Conduct and administrative authority. We never did succeed in resolving this problem in our discussion group meetings. Rather, people reflected more candidly in their journals where anonymity of authorship was guaranteed.

During the interviews with individual collaborators upon closure of the reflective group meetings, the following comments were offered as a response to whether the communication was at a level that allowed for freedom of expression.

> Oh, I think I could safely say that the communication was not at the level I would like for the simple reason that as a teacher, we are bound by a professional code of ethics and you're simply not at liberty to say the kinds of things you might deeply feel.... So I think it

> sheds, or it almost puts a filter across all forms of communication.

There was also a consensus that the journal writing allowed for more freedom of expression.

> Do you think the code of ethics, the professional code of ethics, in any way filtered the communication process that occurred?
>
> Probably. I think it's filtering everything we do. I suppose I never gave it much thought at the time, but it certainly makes you careful about what you say and the way you say things.
>
> Does it prevent you from saying anything that you feel is vital?
>
> It didn't prevent me from writing anything.
>
> So that came out in the journals then. You had more freedom to express yourself?
>
> I felt that.

The disempowerment of communication because of administrative authority was shown in the following quotes:

> So you don't think anything was being filtered other than through the fact that you were fearful that there might be repercussions. Is that what you're saying?
>
> Long-term repercussions, yes.

or

> Although I think it's also fair to say that there were some people that held back because of the presence of [superintendent of schools]. You know, his comment that, 'Feel free to come and see me. I will never reprimand...', or whatever, I think was taken as coming from a particular source, because we do know that certain staff members have spoken out and were reprimanded for doing so. I don't think that added anything to the amount of input he is going to get.

or

> I think it should be noted, also, that probably the reason why all this freedom of speech, and what not, is surfacing at this point is that there was not a principal at our staff meeting. [Name] was there, but he announced that he was not going to be principal next year, so that removes the fear that any staff member might have that there's going to be serious timetabling, or who knows what else, repercussions based on what somebody might say at that meeting.

Some of the collaborators stated in their personal interviews that a benefit of the action-research model has been that it gave them an avenue to express what they thought were problems or concerns relating to the research question and the school.

> Sure, it gets people used to the fact that these sorts of things can be talked about, rather than, maybe behind people's backs. And also, that increasing just the general awareness of the fact that what is happening on staff, in all areas, I think that it was a contributing kind of influence there, where as you say, with people asking about what are we doing at our meetings. It makes them even stop and think for a moment about, 'There are people meeting here who are interested and concerned about what's happening', and as a rub-off effect, it's going to filter down to them as well.

An element of hope that upon conclusion of the research project, communication would remain democratized was expressed. Patti Lather (1986) supports this viewpoint:

> By resonating with people's lived concerns, fears, and aspirations, emancipatory theory serves an energizing, catalytic role. It does this by increasing specificity at the contextual level in order to see how larger issues are embedded in the particulars of everyday life (p.267).

Collaborators seemed to indicate that this democratization was given legitimacy because the research program was sanctioned by the administration of the school and the district. This leads to a discussion of the next theme, collaboration.

The Collaborative Action

When it was discovered that a new principal would be coming to the school for the following school year, the collaborative group discussed possible discontinuance of the collaborative group meetings. Without the sanction of the new principal, the group felt it would have been subversive to continue the collaborative action. The following comments offered by collaborators support the perceived need for legitimacy.

> Well, this got started basically as a result of a project that you are working on at university, and I think that lends certain license for us to meet and discuss things as a group and talk over the way things go. Although I agree with you, there is certainly nothing wrong with teachers meeting to discuss how things are going in general, I think without the auspices of your project, it takes on a totally different hue.

or,

> Do you want, do any of you want to continue just sort of a talk session to air some of our ideas and perhaps make suggestions to the staff? Is there a need for that kind of group in the school?

> Are you saying irrespective of whether the new guy...?

> I mean, that's another possibility too. That a group of whoever wants to can come, sit and talk about various things that we can do, and make recommendations to the staff. They can accept or not accept, but there is no avenue to do that at the moment.
>
> That would be rather a subversive activity if ever I saw one.
>
> ...But frankly, the fact that I can't meet with you and discuss what goes on at school, I don't buy that. If that's subversive, then we're in deep you know what.

The collaborators found some difficulty with the open-ended commitment of the collaboration in this research project. The following comment was made after the discussion group collaborators concluded the research project.

> One thing that I found a little bit odd was it was kind of hard to have a meeting one day with everybody there, and the next time, if one or two people are away, it really does change the complexion of what you say and how you say it and everything that goes on in the meeting.... I feel our discussions could have been more consistent and carried perhaps a little more nicely from one meeting to the next if everybody who was at the previous one was at the subsequent one.

This quote reflects anxiety about the varying context of collaborative research. Each discussion group meeting required a renegotiation at a personal level of the collaborative interaction, depending on which collaborators were present. This concern was never raised when the research model was designed. It focuses attention on the

need for the presence of trust and acceptance among the collaborators which a varying context does not permit.

Allowing staff members who were not present at collaborative meetings to submit ideas through articles or written notes also varied the collaborative context significantly. A certain cohesiveness appears to have evolved among the discussion group collaborators that made this a 'we' group with a united purpose. One reflective comment illustrates this.

> I was rather surprised to find that there were other people who were participating in this that weren't at the meetings. I wasn't aware of this at first and it kind of surprised me when a couple of things that came up in the journals were mentioned in our group, and I couldn't figure out how this was possible if everybody was stating a certain thing. I didn't know which of the people were saying one thing and writing something else. It kind of took me by surprise.

Another collaborator offered:

> The air of secrecy, the fact that there were people who were participating, but not known to the others, seemed somewhat, I found, rather odd in a way.

One of the benefits attributed to the collaboration by some of the collaborators was that it had positive effects on their own morale.

> Personal benefits?
>
> Well, you mentioned an opportunity to talk with some of the other members on staff.
>
> Yes, I suppose that's professional and personal in a way. Just to know that there were more people than just one or two that are concerned

> about some of the things that are happening, I suppose was a benefit.
>
> In that it gave you moral support, you felt?
>
> That too, and we were thinking along the same lines. You don't feel that you're the only one that maybe thinks that there is something wrong.
>
> So, it diminished the sense of isolation you were feeling?
>
> Oh, I suppose so.

Another collaborator offered the following comments:

> Personally, I liked to be in an environment where people are sharing, where my colleagues are sharing with one another. I just feel that it's just that much more professional to talk about the way things were run, and to figure out solutions to problems, and to discuss things openly. I think it really helps that, the whole relationship between staff members and helps the school run more efficiently. Personally, as well, it maybe clarified a few things in my own mind. Maybe I also found agreement with a few things that I was thinking. And also, they opened up my eyes to a few things that I hadn't thought of. So, that sort of helped.

As for myself, I found having other people involved with me in the collaborative process proved to be a tremendous source of support and stability. This was particularily so when there was tension between achieving my own research goals and seeming lack of co-operation on the part of an administrative collaborator. The following exchange between myself and another collaborator illustrates the stabilizing effect the collaborator had in this situation.

me: We have a major problem. (name of administrator) is downstairs talking to (name), waiting for people who aren't here to come. And I just mentioned to (administrator) that we were waiting for him and he said, "Well go ahead without me".

Is there any purpose in doing so?

me: Well, let's talk about it. What can we do? I mean, number one, I take exception to somebody scheduling a meeting for 11:30 when he knows this one starts at 11:40.

Did he forget?

me: He's just standing there. They're not here. Should we fold this project with a letter about why?

What does that do for your research project?

me: Well, I've got enough data....

How about just waiting?

me: He's a core collaborator and we all know that.

I suggest we postpone this for a month and see if that doesn't help.

As a researcher, I must address the question of representation. Did the data collected from meetings with this group of collaborators reflect the majority view of teachers in this particular school? Was that a goal of this collaboration? What about the views of people who chose not to get involved in this project? Why did they choose not to become collaborators? This raises a question for future research. Perhaps doing a profile of people who choose to become involved in collaborative

research projects would make explicit a collaborative consciousness. What is to be learned from hypothesizing the answers to these questions?

This collaborative group did not represent the school. As one collaborator stated:

> No. I think it represented a number of people who care a lot and maybe that just take risks a little more. They tend to be a little more open about their thoughts. There are a lot of people who just don't say anything, and maybe a lot of people that are more apathetic that just don't care to be involved. And some that I think are harboring a lot of feelings, but they just don't feel free to say it openly.... We're all kind of, more or less, a particular kind of person.

This research focused on a specific question relating to improving staff meetings. Change could be implemented without the concensus from the staff as a group, so it was not critical to be representative of the entire staff. In other areas of collaborative work, the interests and focus of the collaborators could and necessarily do limit the range of data. This subjectivity is intrinsic to the research model.

A final consideration was my dual role as researcher/collaborator. There was a tension between my responsibility to my research agenda and to the agenda of the other collaborators. One of the collaborators noticed this tension.

> I sensed a real separation between you and what you were trying to organize.... I felt that there was a sense of, 'How come he's not here this time? Well that's really going to make a difference to our meeting' and that tension,

> which is rather unfortunate that you had to be working with people who seemed somewhat reluctant to get involved.

I also felt an enormous responsibility about the success and continuation of this project. No doubt, I communicated this intensity as I negotiated with my colleagues to become involved in the research project as collaborators, and as we encountered difficulties at our discussion meetings. Because I had initiated the project, the other collaborators looked to me for leadership when the communication or collaboration became strained and unfocused. This conversation elicits this point.

> When we really didn't know which direction to go, you would provide us with some piece of information or some statement that would perhaps set us off in a particular direction which we would then feel free to vary from if we felt like it.

Because of this duplicity of my role, I was consciously using this research project to help collaborators understand and change their situations. Emancipatory research is political and engulfs its own tensions. The collaborators, while active subjects, were also parts of my research agenda. I asked the question of whether my role imposed meaning on this research situation, rather than negotiated meaning with the research participants. Lather (1986) proposes a solution that includes the dialectic of this tension.

> Following Fay (1977), I propose that the goal of emancipatory research is to encourage self-reflection and deeper understanding on the

> part of the persons being researched at least as much as it is to generate empirically grounded theoretical knowledge (p. 263).

This project succeeded at both levels. Our collaboration led to empirical data for improving staff meetings and to increased self-reflection and consciousness on the part of the collaborators. This research allowed praxis-oriented inquirers to engage in ideological critique and in transformative action leading to a theoretically guided program of action. This leads me to a discussion about research praxis and the action research spiral.

The Action Research

The four moments of action research as outlined by Kemmis and McTaggart (1982) are:

1. to develop a plan of action to improve what is already happening,
2. to act to implement the plan,
3. to observe the effects of the action in the context in which it occurs, and
4. to reflect on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent action, and so on, through a succession of cycles (p. 27).

The plan in this research project evolved as negotiated between myself and my university peers, and

myself and my teaching colleagues. The plan to have group discussion meetings with teachers and administrators at a particular school emerged with a dual purpose: to improve monthly staff meetings and in so doing, to improve communication between teachers and administrators. Both goals involved risk and constraints.

The largest risk this plan had to overcome was the participation of the principal of the school as a collaborator. The collaborative group could not have made changes without the approval of the school administration. Therefore, it was critical to the success of the project that the principal interact with the project as a collaborator, rather than as principal of the school. Before the principal joined the collaborative group, he had to commit himself to the research goal of improving communication amongst the staff. The action research model required a collaborative process. This meant the principal had to agree to relinquish his authority while participating in the research endeavor. Convincing the principal to do this required extensive negotiation on my part as the researcher before the group meetings could actually begin.

The risk of attrition of the principal during the research project imposed constraints on the plan and therefore, on the outcomes of the research project. Many of the collaborators did not trust that the principal

would assume a collaborative role during the discussion group meetings, particularly at the initial meetings. Therefore, they planned with constraint and caution. Major issues were not tackled in the initial stages of the project as collaborators were not sure of the communication context (trust level) at that point. They were in a sense 'testing the waters' to see how the administration would react to subtle changes before they engaged in more difficult ones.

The collaborative plan allowed for one change at each staff meeting with reflection about the change after implementation. One such change was to formalize attendance at the staff meeting by noting absenteeism in the minutes. Another example of a change was categorization of agenda items according to their communicative purpose. The outcome of the implementation was then observed and then discussed at subsequent discussion group meetings or through the journals. If further changes were required, they were planned as a result of the outcome of the initial change.

The action research moment that dominated this research endeavour was that of reflection. The dominance of the reflection moment in our collaborative action placed restraints on the outcome of our research. This group met for one hour periods over five months and

enacted only three changes at staff meetings during that period. Most of our meeting time focused on negotiating and interpreting the meaning of shared experiences. The reflection moment was very time-consuming as collaborators elaborated on an understanding of meaning without time constraints. Sometimes several meetings were necessary before a consensus was achieved on a single issue. This has implications for future use of this model in a school context.

My first suggestion is that the nature of the school year places constraints on the action research plan. In the case of this project, I did not define the research problem until early December. Negotiations for collaborators and the Christmas vacation consumed the remainder of December, making it January before we generated research data as a collaborative group. I would suggest that anyone attempting to implement the action research spiral plan to begin earlier in the school year and/or meet more frequently than once a month. This would allow adequate time for the reflection that is so vital to the success of this type of research, as well as for sufficient changes (the acting on) to make a noticeable difference in the practice being examined by the research.

Furthermore, by May, the nature of the organization of the school tends towards closure. It would be difficult to implement any changes in practice at this

time period given that the focus of the school is to finish, rather than to begin.

A final constraint posed by the school year is the attrition of collaborators, who perhaps choose to leave the school for another position. This circumstance profoundly affected this research endeavour as it was the principal who decided not to return to that position in the following year. In fact, when the collaborative group discovered in May that he was leaving, it was mutually agreed upon that the action research project would have to draw to a conclusion.

> Let's come back to the question of the gap, the gap between one leaving and the other coming. What can we, as a committee, do in terms of helping the staff through that? Be it through a meeting or whatever?
>
> Well, I think the first thing we should do, since we have, as a group, discussed the staff meetings several times now and probably given more thought to it than many other members on staff, arrange to meet with our new principal as soon as possible and just invite him to a general little meeting where we can outline some of the things we were doing and see if it can fit into something he wants to start, or he wants to continue, or something he wants to stop or whatever.

Emancipation

Many of us, at that moment (the principal had told us he was not reapplying for his position and yet, communication at the May meeting had been candid) in our

research project, did not want to see it end. However, we realized that the ambiguity of the changed collaboration made it impossible to continue until further negotiations occurred with the new principal, commencing in September of the following school year. These comments show some of the concerns relating to the new context.

> You have to be careful, too, because we're going to be - we might be perceived by Central Office that we're a group that is trying to drum this guy into a pool of influence.
>
> Yes, you have to be very careful. It might be conceived by himself that we're trying to tell him what to do. I think that would be dangerous. We have to think about this.

The collaborative plan for continuation of this research endeavor was to have one of the collaborators, an administrator, approach the new principal regarding the collaborative group and its purpose.

> Yes, the key is to leave it very much up to him to ask for it. Just say, 'This is what we've done. If you want to continue with this or get any extra information on it, please feel free to just see me'. And leave it at that. No pressure, no nothing.

Once this was done, and I had submitted a research report to the district office and new principal, no further action ensued regarding the collaborative project. The context for the research endeavor had changed requiring the collaborators to renegotiate from the beginning in order to continue work on the original research question. The energy and time required to begin again were prohibitive, so no action occurred.

As a researcher, I felt that the bureaucratic nature of administration had succeeded unintentionally in subverting the democratization of communication in that particular school. At our general staff meeting in May, prior to concluding the discussion group meetings, a major outbreak had occurred in the communication where people began sharing their viewpoints on a particular topic in a more candid way than had occurred at any of our other meetings. One collaboration remarked about this.

> Now, had that been discussed all the way long, openly, there would have been no need for this outbreak of discussion. And I think, if these outbreaks happen, fewer and fewer people won't get involved in doing something in some dark little room for fear that someone is going to find out and they'll be faced with 'having to face the music' at a meeting.

Perhaps that people felt comfortable enough to express their views openly at the May meeting meant that our collaborative group had opened a channel for discussion to occur by changing some aspects of the staff meeting format. As collaborators, we all wanted to believe that we had some positive impact on improving the communication at that meeting.

CHAPTER V

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF ISSUES RELATED TO IMPROVING MONTHLY STAFF MEETINGS

Professionalism

Attendance of staff members at general monthly staff meetings was one of the first issues raised by collaborators at the monthly reflective group meetings. One of the collaborators affirmed:

> Well, I think an issue that came up was this business of attendance at staff meetings. I think it should be a common belief that staff meeting is part of your regular working day. It's part of your professional duty, unless you have other commitments.

The comment appears to be grounded in an historical framework. I offer several quotes from collaborators to support this viewpoint.

> Normally, with other staffs that I've been with, that's listed first - the roll. It's noted right at the beginning of the minutes, but it's not actually part of the minutes.

> But I was surprised that the attendance wasn't noted in the minutes of the meeting: those who were present and those who weren't. Because any company you work for, any outfit you work for, if there is a meeting held and if you're not at that meeting, it's noted.

> ...we're getting school time off to have a staff meeting.

It is required. No question about it.

The reflective group decided to implement a change at the regular monthly staff meetings. Rather than noting attendance, the group decided to note the names of people on staff who were absent from the meeting, with the hope that it would bring pressure on those who weren't attending meetings to do so. The following dialogue is rather revealing.

> If we implement this change, what are we hoping it will do? That's the other question.
>
> Make people more conscientious.
>
> What we're assuming, the underlying message I'm perceiving is this, is that by making the absence public, it will bring peer pressure. Is that sort of what we're saying?
>
> Personal pressure.
>
> Both.
>
> If the same individuals are missing, just showing up for the minutes of the meeting, something's wrong. When it happens, everyone sits and looks at each other and you can tell what they're thinking. I'm here. Why aren't they? That's what they're thinking. But you can't stand up and say it. You're not just going to challenge somebody.

To conclude, the importance of attendance was formalized by making it a part of the written record of the meeting. It was also agreed that those staff members who would be unable to attend a meeting had a professional obligation to notify the administration of the school in advance.

> ...it's required that you attend staff meetings and I would appreciate it if you would contact me before hand if you're going to be away.
>
> I think you're only being professional if you know you're going to be away to see you in advance and say, 'I'm not going to be there. Is there something I should do to compensate, or can you give me some information that will help?'.

After several meetings, where absences had been recorded, the reflective group perceived that attendance was more regular than it had previously been. I observed that this change in attendance pattern may have also reflected other changes that were implemented in the meetings making them flow more smoothly and perhaps, more effectively.

Another issue raised through the reflection group discussions was that of the ATA (Alberta Teachers' Association) portion of the general staff meetings. The group agreed that the current format, whereby the ATA component came at the end of the general staff meeting, severely hampered effective communication. The following comments support this point of view.

> See, our problem too is that, and I've discussed it with the ATA, is that we have our ATA meeting after the staff meeting. One suggestion that was brought up was to have the ATA meeting first. I'm willing to do that, but if the ATA meeting goes to 4:30, is everyone going to stick around for an hour?
>
> How long does it take for ATA?
>
> Well, they run through it very quickly. ...I suggested maybe we should try a separate meeting for ATA because ATA doesn't get much time. It's

> always a rush to get through and everybody is always very conscious of the time. And yet, I think the ATA has some important things that should be discussed.

The suggestion that a separate ATA staff meeting be held, perhaps at noon hour or every third Wednesday of the month, rather than at the same time as the general staff meeting, received serious consideration by the reflective group.

> But why, for example, couldn't they just have one noon hour set off per month just for ATA? I think people would drop in if it were at noon.
>
> It's a shame to have the two meetings together.
>
> I mean, you take the ATA format alone and probably tie up a whole meeting with things that are relevent and important to teachers.
>
> See, maybe the ATA meeting should be a different date. My personal view is that it should because I don't think ATA people should have their emphasis cut by the other meeting.
>
> All you hear is... Any questions? Okay, meeting dismissed. ATA is more important than that. It's our professional organization. I've always felt that our ATA meetings get very low priority.
>
> So discussion isn't occurring that might occur if the meeting were at a different time or formatted differently.

Although the group never achieved consensus about this, the most concrete recommendation (although implementation did not occur because of the closure of the school year) was that the ATA meeting be part of a second monthly meeting, whose focus would be to foster professionalism.

> Like it would be nice to be able to take another meeting, have two regular meetings a month, and at one meeting do the kind of stuff we're doing now. It would be shorter, of course, because we wouldn't have the ATA component. And at the other one, do a little bit of inservice during our school time off, if we could get a half hour or whatever, and then follow that up with an ATA component.

It was also considered relevant that ATA representatives make some effort to inform staff members of discussion items before the meeting to proyide adequate time to consider the items.

> One of the things that I'm going to suggest to those ATA people too is that they pass on the information to us, rather than passing it out there, because you don't have time to read it, you don't have time to think about it. It should be in our mailboxes a day or so ahead of time as well, I believe.

Finally, it was planned that if a separate meeting was to be implemented, including an ATA component, it should be held in advance of the ATA Council meetings.

> ...We have a separate second meeting, let's say two weeks apart from the regular staff meeting? Providing that fits in with the ATA. Like we really should consider that if we're going to use the ATA component in there, it should be at a time appropriate to gather information for ATA Council.

A third professional consideration that the group reflected on was implementation of an inservice or professional development component at staff meetings. This suggestion came from current practice.

> Just for a PD (professional development) component at our staff meeting - something we're learning. I think maybe the voc. ed. part was leading in to that, a component where you're

> spending fifteen or twenty minutes learning about other areas of the program. The comments about that have all been really positive.
>
> If they are going to be professional meetings, then it should make a difference to them that they're not there - to their practice or whatever.
>
> Now, I'm saying that maybe the whole nature of what we consider to be a professional meeting isn't what occurs at our staff meetings.
>
> Oh, I have a personal view that I would like to see more PD presented at the staff meetings. It does give a forum where that can be done. Of course, that again would make the staff meetings end at lease a half-hour later.

The group reflected on and planned several ways to facilitate encouraging professional development as a component of staff meetings. One of the major plans for implementation that the reflective group seriously considered was to have a small committee established to organize three or four half to three-quarters of an hour presentations at either a regular monthly staff meeting, or in conjunction with a separate ATA meeting, should the latter be realized in the following school year.

> A PD activity group, you want it to be very positive. You know, if the people see it happening once ... you want to be part of the action ... they'll find that it's exciting and you can rejuvenate. Each profession has methods of rejuvenating interest and keeping yourself going. It's a trick. You do things to keep yourself going.
>
> We can try to keep our meeting down to half an hour or three-quarters of an hour and allow another three-quarters of an hour for a PD speaker to come in or whatever is going to happen.

> If you want to be successful, you want to start small. Maybe set a goal for this coming year of four little sessions.

Because this plan was considered toward the end of the school year, the reflective group decided to delay possible implementation to the following school year. It was also planned to have input about the implementation of professional development activities at staff meetings coming from the staff as a whole at the September or October meetings.

> I think to start now in May or in June, it is just too hectic around here. Everybody's burned out and then the're into exams. We're ending up the year.

An interesting discussion amongst the reflective group members ensued concerning the dilemma of professional obligations and time conflicts to attend meetings.

> If you get a teacher, well let's say, trades and services, and the meeting all starts while they're on supervision, what if the teacher is also coaching soccer or volleyball or basketball when it's in the heat of the season when they're either having practices or whatever? There's all these other things, you know, you can say, 'Well, which is more important?'
>
> I think that's a professional activity that should be followed up and if a teacher chooses to do whatever: sports, yearbook, or whatever; if that is more important than subject matter and the important decisions focusing on that, then I think that should be noted. Because I quite frankly think that my most important job goes on right in my classroom and all the things that affect that. The other comes secondary, important, but secondary.

The dialogue illustrated the tension resulting from the many demands placed on a teacher's time. One of the plans that the group proposed to offset the time demands was to implement a calendar of meetings or events that would be set in September. This would allow teachers to schedule their time more effectively than was currently being done with meetings being called on short notice.

> What would be a very interesting thing is to have a committee of teachers struck, say three teachers ...that set up a time line and an event calendar for 1988-89. I've seen schools do it and I think it works good.
>
> What sorts of issues do they deal with?
>
> Well, they deal with everything. What are we going to do? See at our school, you would put all your sports there, you would put everything you're aware of and then you'd say, 'As a staff social committee, are we planning anything this year? What are our events?' You'd talk to your social committee and say, 'What are you guys planning? Three events, two events?' and you put this all on the calendar. Then, when you start in September, you have an overview of what's happening each year. It keeps everybody a little bit on track.
>
> You can plan a lot better, too.

Implementation of such a calendar did occur beginning in the subsequent school year.

Administrative Considerations

Part of the discussion of the reflective group focused on the purpose or nature of monthly staff meetings. From the dialogue insertions that follow, it is

clear that the current format for general staff meetings has emerged from an historical context where the administration guides the direction of the school.

> Do you think a staff meeting is the place for participatory democracy?
>
> I don't think it's the place for the ideal form of participatory democracy, where a decision to be made is a matter of the majority or not. I think much of what has to occur there is not the type of thing that is handled best by that method. Some things are, but I would say the majority are not.
>
> Where has the whole notion of the type of staff meeting that we have now and that I've experienced in every school I've been in, in Alberta. I mean we're not unique here. Where does that come from and why is it so?
>
> I think you have to look at the purposes of the staff meetings to begin with.
>
> ...the bigger meetings, you've got to meet with the whole staff. It's probably the easiest way to disseminate informaton and to get feedback - to identify issues. So, I think there's a need for that kind of meeting.

The administrative purpose of staff meetings was further defined by the following comments made by the school principal.

> The point is: the reason that I bring up some of the items from SAC minutes is because I want to make sure they're emphasized or I need some feedback or somebody to respond to some question that involves the school.
>
> Also, you have to understand that sometimes we're looking for feedback, we're not necessarily looking for a motion to be passed or not passed. Sometimes there will be a case when the staff meeting may show feeling one way and I will make a decision if I disagree with it because of other reasons or other information which I may have which I can't divulge.... I

> mean that's the ultimate administrative responsibility and that is always there.

A further comment offers:

> The staff meeting should be a forum for the administration to explain their rationale for the decisions made during the month, for seeking guidance on new directions they are contemplating...
>
> This means setting the visions for teachers, bringing a side of our past into our future - a tough job. Administration should not get too bogged down in day-to-day stuff. They forget to remind us of where we are heading in the next year or the next five years.
>
> I think it ties into what you are saying, that I think it's my role as an administrator to establish priorities for the school.

The collaborative group accepted the role of the administrator in establishing priorities and an agenda for the school through staff meetings. This group, however, also recognized the need for the administration to use the meetings to achieve staff consensus on issues related to the entire school. The staff as a whole, through an ATA survey, requested that goal setting for the school year be a priority on the agenda for the September staff meeting. This seems to defend the position that to 'realize a dream, you have to take ownership of it'.

Another consideration relating to the administrative aspect of the meeting was the importance of the chair in determining the agenda or order in which items would be discussed.

> The present system of all principals' meetings is to be chairman and principle speaker, giving them more advantages in terms of agenda setting and importance placed on different items. Letting chairing of the meetings alternate between the two vice-principals will show how important that chairing of the meeting is as a means of control.

This suggestion was countered with a comment drawn from an historical context.

> It's not an issue as far as I'm concerned, because really when I think about it, I don't know what difference it makes who sits up there. I can't remember when it was that the chairman's point of view swayed anyone else's when it came to a meeting. If there was something controversial, we voted on it. The only thing that is going to change is the voice that's up there starting the meeting.

Since current practice in the school was that administrators could add their suggestions to the agenda at weekly meetings, and the staff could also have items added to the agenda on request, the reflective group agreed that the meeting agenda was being determined through an open process. They saw no advantages to the communicative process through sharing the chair. No change was implemented.

The Agenda for Monthly Staff Meetings

One of the plans which was implemented successfully was that a final agenda for the meeting was set a week or four days before the staff meeting.

> At the same time though, if somebody is going to be using up my time along with sixty other people's time, it certainly isn't asking too much of them to think far enough in advance to discuss it with the administration and have it put on the agenda.... I don't appreciate my time being taken up by trivia that I have no concern about at all and I'd like to see the administration decide if it's important enough to spend sixty people's time on it.

A further advantage to setting the agenda and making it available to staff before the meeting is staff then have ample time to prepare their discussion points.

> The purpose of having the discussion at staff meetings about those issues is to get different opinions and ideas, or whatever. I think that if people haven't taken the time to read them the day before, then what kind of input are they giving you?
>
> One of the questions is don't give things at the last minute because then we can't prepare. For example, the superintendent, because nobody knew he was coming, so we didn't have any questions to ask.

One of the major changes in the agenda that was successfully implemented as a result of the reflective discussion group's deliberations was categorization of the agenda items. This change arose from a meeting item when the nature of the communication suddenly adopted a very serious tone.

> ...everything prior to that had been general discussion. I think that it changes the tone of the communication when suddenly someone says, 'Let's make this a motion ...'. So in a very subtle way, it adds lended importance if some things are made a motion and other things aren't. It's what we call hidden communication because up to that point, everything had been discussion.

> ...let it be clear which things are going to be dealt with through discussion and which things will be dealt with through a motion, and the staff can also put forward a motion on the agenda, so that there is a clear understanding that these are just general discussion items and these things you better think out because they are important.
>
> What about having three categories on the staff meeting as you go down the agenda: it's either something for feedback, (which means I just want to get some information about how you people feel about this); or it's for discussion, (which means that it's a problem that's been brought up and something we have to talk about, but we won't be dealing with it in a motion form today, but we could later); and then motions.

A categorization was implemented which added increased clarity to the communicative purpose of each agenda item. Feedback items were handled through a discussion; whereas items affecting the staff or school as a whole were dealt with through motions - an attempt to achieve consentual agreement of those present at the meeting. Formalization of the agenda allowed staff to prepare for discussion, as well as to realize the significance of each item.

> For example, the item on the exams, you wanted the staff as a whole to say, 'Yes, this is what we want', didn't you? By putting it into a motion form you wanted a definite decision made by the staff.
>
> I guess so.
>
> In this procedure, then, what would happen is that if someone made that kind of a motion without prior notice, would we table it to the next meeting so that people have time to think about it and discuss it? That would eliminate that railroading comment.

Duration and Frequency of Meetings

A consideration that the reflective group considered relating to the communicative process was the length of the staff meetings and how time affected the quality of input.

> I think we're witnessing a very practical problem here, and that is, when I go in and I see whatever, maybe twenty-nine items on the agenda, I'm not going to talk because I don't want to be there until six o'clock. After two hours, I'm sick of it.
>
> How long should the meeting run?
>
> Definitely no later than five o'clock.
>
> In my opinion, after a whole day of teaching, anything after an hour and a half is really pointless. Three to four-thiry is when I think you get the best input and after that it really degenerates.
>
> People may even have an item that they want to talk about so they just drop it, unless it's a real concern.
>
> But you don't get the input and the discussion that the question merits.

The group discussed various proposals to ameliorate having lengthy meetings. One change that was successfully implemented was the chairperson monitoring and controlling the pace at which items were introduced. This was a subtle change, but it gave the meeting an atmosphere of, 'Let's get down to business and not waste each other's time'. No group consensus was achieved about a definitive

ending time for meetings, but a recommendation that two meetings per month be held was proposed for the following school year, as previously discussed in this paper.

Social Considerations

Embedded in an historical tradition was the notion of sharing food when people gathered together. Although, in previous years, cake had been shared at the end of each general staff meeting, the practice had not been in effect throughout the current school year. The reflective group decided to pose the question of food at the staff meeting to the whole staff who agreed that sharing food improved the 'tone' of the meeting.

> And we already have a social committee in place, so if people are in favor, and the social committee agrees to take care of it, then that's where it ends, I think.

Since implementation occurred on a voluntary basis for the remaining two general staff meetings, the issue needed to be readdressed with the opening of the next school year.

CHAPTER VI

FINAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THIS ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

As a collaborator and a researcher, I feel a sense of powerlessness. This action research project was subverted by an authoritarian model of leadership. This is because the new principal decided not to use the changes suggested or implemented by the reflective group. There are no avenues open to us collaborators within a professional context to implement our recommendations and vision. This project bears witness to the problematic nature of implementation of research in the schools. One premise of the action research model is that all opinions or comments are of equal value. The reality of the school is hierarchial where the principal has more power or authority than the teaching staff. This is a serious constraint for this research model to overcome.

Loyalty and trust were key elements fostering open communiction through a process of negotiating meaning in order to arrive at a shared interpretation. The communication context also relied on the degree of candidness that occurred in the communication among collaborators. Interpreting the context so that it

permitted each collaborator to share his or her concerns or thoughts in an equitable manner was critical to the action research project.

A problematic area with this research model was that it set apart the collaborators into what was perceived by other staff members as a 'particular camp' of individuals. That perception signified that this collaborative group was not representative of the whole staff. This is an inherent difficulty with the nature of collaboration, which seeks participants who share a mutual concern. It defines the parameters of this type of research as being specifically intersubjective and not transferable.

I acknowledge as a researcher that my bias is a significant factor determining the analysis of this research data. Although I attempted to focus on the shared perceptions and assumptions held by the collaborative group, my personal preferences were operative in selecting which data would be used in this document. A consideration worthy of reflection was the danger of this collaborative group assuming an elitist stance - as being the group that knew what was best for the remainder of the staff. A commitment to the four moments of the action research spiral prevented this from occuring because this collaborative group was not suggesting final solutions, but rather, possible changes open to further reflection and change. The action

research group itself always remained open to suggestions from other staff members. We recognized that any changes resulting from our collaborative group decisions required staff acceptance and implementation based on phronesis; that the suggested change seemed to be for the practical good of all.

It is very difficult to assess the project. The rating scales enabled me to assess the momentum and success of the collaboration, but not of the changes we implemented in the monthly staff meetings. I suggest that this is a weakness in the research design. Small changes implemented at meetings as a result of the collaborative action were assessed by the group, but not by the entire staff. In many instances, assessment was a subjective judgement based on whether the collaborators perceived a more positive 'tone' at the meeting. Much of this subjective evaluation was grounded in an historical context of how staff meetings have been conducted. As a result, perhaps entirely new directions or formats for the meeting were not considered to be valid alternatives by the collaborative group. This was so because the group acted from current practice, seeking to transform the 'is' to the 'aught' within the parameters of the larger hierarchical school organization. For example, the suggestion that the meeting be organized in the same manner as a parliamentary session was generally considered

to be ridiculous for the school context. Caution pervaded the implementation of change.

The collaborative group agreed that the communication varied significantly between staff meetings held earlier in the school year as compared to those at the end. Staff expressed their viewpoints more candidly and frequently at the end of this project than at the beginning. It is certain that the context of a staff meeting is dependent on many variables. Therefore, as a researcher, I cannot ascertain, with any conclusiveness, the effects our collaborative action had on monthly staff meetings.

I was not attempting to achieve any generalizable results with this research project. However, through description and critical reflection of what is, this research project attempted to allow the reader to identify similar assumptions of practices which are familiar to the reader. The reader then has the opportunity to enact change as required by reflection about his or her own practice.

In May and June, the focus of teachers, including the collaborative group, was closure rather than implementation of novel ideas. The plans for implementing several changes were intentionally delayed to September, acknowledging that the time of year was not propitious for maximum effectiveness in implementation. By September, the context for the collaboration had changed so drastically

that it was impossible to continue. This necessarily interrupted the action research spiral.

Although this project did improve communication between the administration and staff during the duration of the project, it is clear from the data analysis that the school still operates in a hierarchial, authoritarian paradigm. Teachers in the collaborative group did not challenge this administrative model, but rather, looked at ways to improve it. As Wise (1977) stated:

> In turn, the response of the schools frequently is to accept these new procedures without altering the procedures which already exist. The result is the proliferation of procedures and the appearance of change. But because the existing procedures are not altered, progress has not occurred (p. 54).

I feel the overall success of this project was that teachers gained an understanding of some of the factors preventing effective communication. By coming to an understanding of ourselves, we collaborators moved from an attitude of dependence to one of autonomy. We became active agents rather than passive ones, transforming practices and structures that frustrated our ability to communicate in an equitable manner. As Freedman et al. (1983) have stated:

> Teachers must recognize how the structure of schools controls their work and deeply affects their relationships with fellow teachers, their students, and their studens' families. Teachers must feel free to express these insights and publicly voice their concerns (p. 299).

As a researcher/collaborator, I feel this project has emphasized the tension between what is and what is possible. The Newtonian paradigm is, and the new paradigm is yet to unfold. As I conclude, I feel the tension between despair and hope. The project promised so much and left so much to be resolved. Still the questions have been raised, and we have all been changed. Fay (1977) has stated this function of action research so well:

> The point... is to free people from casual mechanisms that had heretofore determined their existence in some important way, by revealing both the existence and the precise nature of these mechanisms and thereby depriving them of their power. This is what is meant by aiding people who are objects in the world in transforming themselves into active subjects who are self-determining (p. 210).

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APPENDIX I

Thematization of Transcripts

APPENDIX I - EXAMPLE OF THEMATIZATION DONE WITH DISCUSSION GROUP TRANSCRIPTS

Feb. 23, 1988 RESEARCH MEETING 2 TAPESCRIPT

A key and an example for thematization of transcripts of collaborative discussion group meetings.

Key of themes as shown by numbers:

1. equality and emancipation
2. frequency and duration of monthly staff meetings
3. professionalism
4. the agenda
5. administrative concerns
6. the collaborative action
7. the research model
8. social aspects of monthly meetings
9. communication
10. the ATA component of staff meetings
11. attendance and other commitments teachers have

- We have a limited amount of time, so what I'd like to do is maybe spend fifteen minutes or so on the last meeting -just on the changes that we instituted at that meeting. When I was typing up the notes, the three major things that we discussed when we met last time were the length of the meeting, and I think we had decided to be finished by 4:30 if possible. We talked a lot about whether ATA should be or how it should be handled. I don't think that we ever resolved that , judging from the notes.It was just sort of left kind of open-ended. Then the third one we dealt with was attendance. Now,some things that I noticed that came out of the type-written notes was that one of the things that one of us had asked for is that it be clear to the staff that attendance would be taken. If you remember, at the last meeting there was mention made that all people should attend, but no one ever openly said that attendance was being taken and would be noted. Now, if we go back to waht we wanted at the meeting, that was supposed to have been clearly established. (7)

- Well, I sort of got the impression that attendance was being taken , but what threw me was that when we got the minutes, we decided that anyone that wasn't there or who left early, would be noted on the minutes and nothing was there.

- Well, did we make mention of the leaving early ones being recorded?

- They're supposed to have been.

- I know that there were people leaving early , but well, I guess we don't know what was recorded do we, because we didn't get any copies .

- Yes, we did.

- Yes those minutes were out.

- The minutes were out, but there was no mention made of who was or who wasn't at the meeting. (11)

- Everyone except [name].

- but, it wasn't on there who left early .

- So do we want that recorded and added to the record? And how does everybody feel? Do all staff members know that it is recorded?

- Well if they don't, it must be stated clearly at the next meeting, I suppose so that they are clear as to whath's happening.

- Well maybe we should speak to [name] and ask that this be done. Or is it not important? Do we not want the whole staff to be aware of it?

- Well if it's going to be done, they should know about it.

- Or was the location in the minutes the problem? Maybe attendance should be right at the beginning of the minutes.

- Well, I missed that. I didn't see it.

- I didn't either.

- So, it was done.

- Normally, with other staffs that I've been with, that's listed first- th roll. It's noted right at the beginning of the minutes, but it's not actually part of the minutes. (11)

- What does the principals' association do ?

-We've sort of spent the first fifteen minutes talking about things that came out of our last meeting and...[buzzer] we just were wondering if it should be mentioned to all staff that attendace is being taken. Certainly, they were told that attendance was important, but I was wondering if all the staff knew that if they wern't there , it was being noted. And also, will we know if and when people leave?

- Some teachers will wonder how far you want to go . So, for the first meeting we didn't.

- Well, do we want to start maybe with just attendance and see if that makes any difference or is the coming and going even a problem?

- Well , obviously if we have someone taking the minutes trying to keep track of what's haapening at the meeting and track of that - you know, how far do you want to take it? I guess my question would be is what is reasonable and what is fair and what becomes a little bit ridiculous. If we have someone who is waiting for a phone call or who is taking phone calls or whatever, and they're in and out of the meeting four or five times, do we want to record that every time ? Perhaps three or four people do that kind of thing , but maybe a better way is to look at it and say that okay, if there is a hassle with somebody constantly going out , then it's up to the administration to look into it. (11) (9) (3)

- Or perhaps we should do what they do with the Principals'Association minutes . Like if you're gone like , I can see for a phone call, that really doesn't bother me, but like if you're staying , like I'd guess you'd have to set an arbitrary time , I suppose, and then just put "in part" attended like the principals' association . Like I have no idea ...

- But it's the difference, [name], of looking out for seven people versus fifty.

- Yes, that's true. As you say, the secretary is supposed to be recording the minutes, they're going to have trouble with all this.

- And I say let's look at what we're doing . Let's look at the reason and if we start becoming really picky then it's going to look as if it's really picky and that becomes a judgement decision.

- Do you think maybe the reason that this thing came up was because it's the same people doing this all the time and the staff have noticed this for a long , long time? And I think still it's the same people coming and going all the time. It makes a person wonder why every time there is a staff meeting, the same people have to come and

go fifteen times. I think that if we pay attention to that, we will see that is what's happening. So, I suppose that becomes a problem.

- Well, I'm optomistic that as we streamline , if that's what we can all it here, our staff meetings, like we kept it to 4:30 last time, (2) that people are going to realize that every topic that is covered there is important and that they should be there for it. I think that (11) if staff meetings start to drag on , people get tired of sitting there and are going to look for ways to get out of it . They are going to plan for appointments and this and that . They're not going to be afraid to miss it because it's not a pleasant experience .

- Okay, I think (name) has brought up two points if I can paraphrase you. Number one is if this is a big enough problem that we really need to worry about it. Number two is that administratively it is a very difficult thing to monitor. Is what we gain by it worth setting a system up that will be awkward to set up?

- If again we're using 90% of someone's time for 5% of the problem , it 's ineffective. And you know there are some administrators who take the view that people you have to fight that hard to get to a meeting ,what is the benefit to be gained anyway? They're going to be okay. They'll look at it and say (unclear on tape).

- The thing is that if you observe the staff meetings , there were a lot of people at the last staff meeting . There asn't very many people missing the staff meeting. Either it's just filtered down that attendance was being taken and that ones just showing up, just don't bother showing up , which a lot of people do .

- Yes, that's true . but I like the idea of attendance being taken . On the other hand, you get too picky as we're talking about . You turn it into a negative effect on staff.

- I would rather see, in all honesty, our staff meetings become a (3) liitle more , well, I have a leaning towards more professional . development. I'd rather see staff meetings become important to people. This isn't th first time that I've tried to keep it to 4:30. I've always tried to keep meetings to 4:30 . We went really over once. I would rather try and emphasize the positive . Certainly there is certain housekeeping that we do on the negative that (unclear on tape).The other thing that I advise you is that you're never going to get a staff of fifty- five, fifty-six people a perfect staff meeting.

- I was going to say I think we should forget about the partial attenders and concentrate on those that aren't there at all . If the partial attenders develop into some kind of a problem , we'll deal with it later.

- Well I'm not going to divulge anything further, but I have a problem right now with a staff member and I'm going to have to decide what to (9) do. It's a bit of a hard one to know what to do. So you know that's someting we have to think of. Should the whole staff ...(unclear) Should we bring it up at a formal staff meeting? How far do you go?

- Then you're operating on the fear principle.

- Yes. Everybody(no clear on tape).

- so are we Okay with attendance now? That we'll take attendance. It

will be noted, and just leave it at that.

- Sure. If problems arise, problems will be dealt with individually.

- About five more minutesonany of those other issues and then let's move on to to some of the things that came out of the journals.

- What's this attendance.

- That was what we just talked about.

I think that it was positive , that everybody was positive , in terms of the 4;30 ending. I don't know that anybody was going to complain about that.

- There were two comments in the journals relative to the length of meeting. One is on the board . Number two , motion on students was railroaded because there wasn't time to discuss it. Someone else said they thought the pace was too fast . It was obvious it was being rushed. Now, I don't know how most of us felt during that meeting, as you say, there is a compromise . You want to be out of there , we have to move. (9)

- I think that's the fear of setting a time limit is that people are going to look at their watches and say "Gee, if I bring up this topic" (that could be important) and they look at their watch and say it's close to 4:30, they're going to feel like a terd bringing it up at that time because it's going to run the meeting past 5:00 .So, I don't know that we should stress that we want to be done at a certain time or if we should try to live with the time , but I don't think that we should make it a priority so that we are leaving out items that might be discussed. (2) (9)

- One of the suggestions that also came up from the writing that was handed in to me was that an agenda, a final agenda, be set a week before the meeting, or four days before the meeting . The person who made the suggestion also said that this would allow the administration to contact those people about how long the discussion would go, the order , the importance - something like that. So that there could be some determination ofwheter we need two meetings versus one . (4)

- I personally can't see that that would even be a problem because those thiongs that are bropught up as added items aren't ususally very long to begin with. If they are, then usually they say that they want to be put on the agenda. It could become a pain for everybody.

- At the same time though, if somebody is going to be using up my time along with sixty others people's time, it certainly isn't asking too much of them to think far enough in advance to discuss it with the administration and have it put on the agenda at the time or in the typed-in section , rather than sitting back and saying, "Oh yah, now I remember something that I probably should have done , or now I've got somehting that we can talk about." You'd eliminate that. I don't appreciate my time being taken up sometimes by a bunch of trivia that I have no concern about at all and I'd like to see the administration decide if it's important enough to spend sixty people's time on it. (4) (5) (9)

- Well, perhaps they could just mention it to the administration even the day of the meeting . To try and get it done four days ahead or a week ahead (garble).

It seems to me another comment that came up was one or two things like SAC policies. You know, when we get the handout two or three days ahead of time , and yet, we'll spend time at the meetings talking, or rather re-reading it and then talking about it. One of the comments in the journals was that it's the staff members' responsibility to read them , so why are we taking time at the meeting to do that? Why not just say are there any comments or questions and asume that everybody has read them .

end

- Agere

APPENDIX II

Analysis of a Personal Interview

APPENDIX II - AN EXAMPLE OF ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL INTERVIEW

Comments were used to support themes arising from the thematization of discussion group meetings in Appendix I

- Interview # 2 - June02,1988

- Okay, I think i'd really like to leave this really open-ended. Try avoid using names for obvious reasons. Let's start off with how you felt with where the research went. Whether it was beneficial to the school , first of all. How you feel about it personally.

- Well I think it did help out the staff meetings with the organization of the agenda. Some of the meetings that we had tended to get a little tense when people took personal offence to something that wasn't addressed personally at them. And, I felt uncomfortable with that and because of that , it took a while to get back into , a few meetings , to get back into being more open again. It shut things down for awhile, especially, when everyone was kind of on guard anyways. And then, when the blow up appeared, it juswt set things further back, in my mind anyways.

- Do you think, then , the communication wasn't as open as you would have liked it to have been?

- Yes.

- To what degree do you think the professional code of ethics prevented that from happening?

i really don't think the professional code of ethics prevented it from happening. I thought it was the intimidation factor that prevented it from happening.

So, you don't think anything was being filtered other than through the fact that you were fearful that there might be repercussions. Is that what you're saying?

- Long term repercussions. Yes.

- Yes.

I don't particularly have an open, trustworthy feeling amongst those kinds of people.

- Do you think that there is anyway that the research model could have overcome that?

- No, I think you did overcome it with the journals, like you didn't have to speak out, but you could write about it.

- So the journals helped make up for that deficiency?

- Yes, I think so.

- Do you have any other comments ,other than just the structuring of the staff meeting, about some of the positive or negative things that came out of the research project? Like outcomes?

- Oh, I enjoyed them in the sense that we were talking about somethning that we perceived to be a problem in that the staff meetings weren't working all that well and there wasn't a lot of feedback. But, I lost my train of thought.

- outcomes.

- The . I was expecting it to be kind of more focused on more open type meetings where we could kind of perceive some other possible change.

- You don't think it accomplished that, eh?

- No.

- Okay. Can you think of any ways things could have been done differently so that could have been accomplished?

- Not really. See, you had it set up well, in the sense that everybody, the main people who conducted the staff meetings were there, and they got to say their input, and we got to see their side of the story and why they do things the way they do, which was done well. And you had it set up well with having them there. and then our journals being able to be written.

- A secondary focus of the coallaborative process, as we set it up, was to try to improve the communication between staff and administration of the school. That was certainly a focus of that research groups' meeting. Do you think in any way we accomplished that?

- Perhaps marginally, in communication you have to have the communicators accepting what the others say.

- Right.

- And I don't believe that was the case. The minor points that really didn't matter , fine,you know,a little bit of control to this station to make people happy.The major points were .....(can't make it out.)

- Do you think that what we did had any practical implications for other school problems or teaching problems or anyhting like that? Like do you see that that type of a model could be used generally speaking in schools or say, if you had a teaching problem in your classroom and you wanted some input about it, that you could use that kind of a model with students,even? Or with other teachers teaching in your area?

- I could see it with other teachers in the area because if you had a colleague come in to see your classroom, one you'd have to be on good terms with them and you'd hve to respect them, so he could speak openly and honestly to you so you wouldn't take it as a personal affront ,but the students, I don't know. You'd have to train them , first of all, to be looking for ....(can't make it out).

- you just said that you'd have to trust. Do you think that's a major problem with the collaborative process? So the problem, if I'm understanding what you're saying is, one of the major problems with our collaboration was that real trust never had a chance to develop?

- I believe so.

- Okay. Do you think we represented the majority of feelings of staff in the school?

APPENDIX III

Synopsis of a Discussion Group Meeting

APPENDIX III - A SYNOPSIS OF A DISCUSSION GROUP MEETING
-a Summary of Major Issues Raised During the Meeting

Research Project: 7
How Can Staff Meetings Be Improved?

2nd meeting: Feb. 23, 1988 A Synopsis

1. 15 min: rethinking changes instituted at February meeting.

a. meeting should finish by 4:30 p.m. if possible
b. How should the A.T.A. part of the meeting be handled ? This item is still to be discussed as no resolution has yet been achieved.
c. attendance - Is it now evident to all staff members that attendance is being noted? We decided not to worry about keeping a record of people who left the meeting early. It was felt that absences should be clearly noted at the beginning of the minutes for each meeting.
d. Consensus achieved that if we streamline the meeting to ensure that every item discussed is important to most of the staff, attendance will cease to be problematic.

Outcomes:

1. Agreement that the problem was being dealt with .
2. From an administrative point of view, attendance is difficult to monitor.
3. Suggestion that if we had a professional development component in the meetings, they would become more important to staff and encourage participation. (Not concluded at this meeting)
4. Reminder to the group that it would be very difficult to please all, given the large staff at this school.
5. Consensus that everybody at the meeting felt positive about finishing at 4:30 p.m..

2. Discussion ensued about the length of time alloted for discussion, given that the meeting should conclude by 4:30p.m..
Was the pace of the meeting too fast in order to accommodate the finishing time?

3. A suggestion was made that a final agenda be set about a week before the meeting to help to determine the length of time needed for the meeting. Most group members felt this was not necessary. It was agrred that setting an agenda several days ahead of the meeting would suffice.

4. Discussion ensued about going over SAC minutes at the meetings. The administration felt that an awareness of certain items by all staff members required inclusion of these minutes at our staff meetings. Also , it allows the administration to arrive at an understanding of how staff feel about the various items. Alternatives were explored, but the group agreed that the present practice was probably the most beneficial to all concerned.

5. Problem raised : Why aren't all staff members motivated or concerned enough to read SAC minutes before coming to the staff meeting? Some items need to be carefully thought out in advance.

6. Question: Why wasn't staff notified in advance of a visitor at the staff meeting? This would have permitted staff to prepare items of concern for discussion. Was there a hidden agenda on the part of the administration in inviting the guest that the staff was not aware of? Was the intention of the visit made clear to the staff?

7. Question raised about minutes as"...just another piece of paper in my mailbox, so I'm not going to read them." What does this statement indicate to us about the nature of our jobs and the efficiency of the communication syten that is currently in place in the school? Is it perceived to be effective or not? Do staff members read or not read what is put in their mailboxes? If not, why not? What alternatives are there?

8. It was noted that the "Voc. Ed. Presents" were viewed as being very positive. It was suggested that as time progresses, other areas be encouraged to do the same so that all members on staff became knowledgeable of the school's programs.

9. Visibility of all staff members at meetings was raised as an issue of concern. This lead to agreement that receiving phone calls in the staffroom during meetings was to be discontinued.

10. Discussion occurred related to following more of a business meeting format as per Robert's Rules of Order. The administration felt that the current format allowed ample opportunity for people to present their views. How does changing from a general discussion to a motion change the tone of the communication situation. It was suggested that the motion formalizes the communication - renders the tone more serious. What then determines if a question will be dealt with by discussion or by motion? Is this of any concern to our group? The administration response is that motions are called for when the decision affects school policy. This formalizes the decision being made. This brings to light a tension between policy and practice. What will occur if practice does not concur with the policy? Does the staff know that the decision is being considered as a school policy?

11. A suggestion was made that future agendas clearly indicate which items would be for general discussion and those that would be considered through motions. This suggestion was accepted by the group.

12. The tension between the authority of the administration and the consentual decision - making of staff meetings came to light. Confidentiality sometimes requires the administration to override staff decisions. Would this be the only reason for the administration to overrule a staff decision, or are there more situations where the administration would chose to make decisions unilaterally?

13. Does the order that items are placed on the agenda have any impact on the outcome of the meeting? Should items requiring staff input be dealt with at the beginning of the meeting? This question was not resolved at this meeting.

14. Concern expressed by some group members about whether what we were deciding to change reflected the will of the rest of the staff. We returned to the nature of this action research project. The research model encourages us to return to questions , to observe , to reflect, to act. We can always look at what practice is again and again. This expresses the HOPE intrinsic in this kind of research.

Outcomes:

1. That the agenda be more categorized.
2. That if something was to be a dealt with through a motion, the opportunity would be given to table the motion for the following meeting. This would allow staff adequate time to consider the motion carefully.

15. Sharing the chair among the administration was suggested. The administration raised the question of what difference it would make if the chair were shared. What would be gained? Is it the chair's function to mediate between opposing views on topics? Does this then mean that the PURPOSE of the meeting is to hear opposing views? How does this relate to democratic dialogue? Is this what occurs at our staff meetings? Do we want our staff meetings to be a forum for free and open dialogue? It was suggested that sharing the chair would bring to light how important chairing the meeting was in terms of control.

It was remarked that all staff have the opportunity to be included on the agenda.

16.The administration affirmed that the staff meetings were not there to emulate parliament with elected representatives and equal responsibilities. The administration affirmed that it was the administration's responsibility to establish priorities ,to mediate. This discusssion brings to focus another tension of the school. What is the perceived role of the administrative function in a school from

the teachers' point of view ? from an administrator's point of view? Are these shared perceptions? What tensions result in any school if these perceptions are not shared?

17. A question was raised as to how the administration might use staff meetings as a forum for discussing or implementing their vision for the school and for the staff. Do our staff meetings focus too heavily on the daily nitty-gritty of managing a school?

18. The consensus was that the chair should not be shared among administrators, as this would not reflect the true nature of the administrative function in the school. This is to be dealt with further at the next group meeting.

19. A rating scale was handed out to group participants to measure suitability of the research project to date.

20. Do we want or need to meet more frequently?

21. NOTE from the researcher: More and more people are speaking to me about this project and wanting to get involved. Many people are making written or verbal suggestions eventhough they are not attending our meetings. I believe what we are doing is going to improve our agenda. What do you think? Also, don't lose patience with this. Right now, we are still exploring the trust level within the group (something to do with group dynamics) so it is important to remember to proceed with care and respect for all members present at the meeting. We all want this to work or we wouldn't be there. Let's not lose sight of that, nor of the potential for this project to help our school. (End of my pep talk).

APPENDIX IV

Example of Field Notes

APPENDIX IV - EXAMPLE OF FIELD NOTES
Resulting from impromptu conversations

Jan. 21/88

Talked to me about hesitance to be open if the current administrator is present at the collaborative meetings. Felt what would be accomplished was not worth the risk.

I said this was really our only recourse to impleiment change from within and that I felt we had to give it an honest try.

This discussion to me indicates a real need for a paers/project that will lay open the deepseated paranoia on our staff. I will have to speak to other members on staff & get them involved.

Jan 17

Talked to about project in the hallon Sat. We both concurred need to improve communication and collegiality. Explored various issues such as making dept. foeus of interaction vs entire school- Reluctance of people to speak at staff meetings.

Jan 21st – talked to
- felt major admin collab will not allow open discussion
- explored alternatives i.e. written notes under pseydonyms.

APPENDIX V

Rating Scale

APPENDIX V RATING SCALE

Used to evaluate the success of the collaborative action as it occured.

Please circle the appropriate response for each item below. If 'needs improvement' is your response to any item, please elaborate on the back of this sheet.

1. Ability of the research leader to maintain the focus of the research group is:

   Very Good Adequate Needs Improvement

2. Opportunity for the collaborator to express a viewpoint is:

   Very Good Adequate Needs Improvement

3. An atmosphere that permits the collaborator to express ideas candidly is:

   Very Good Adequate Needs Improvement

4. The current format of the discussion group is:

   Very Good Adequate Needs Improvement

5. The frequency of meetings for discussion groups is:

   Very Good Adequate Needs Improvement

6. The time allotment for discussion groups is:

   Very Good Adequate Needs Improvement

7. The current emphasis of the discussion group is:

   Very Good Adequate Needs Improvement

8. The progress of this research endeavour is:

   Very Good Adequate Needs Improvement

9. If I could make changes to this project, I would